



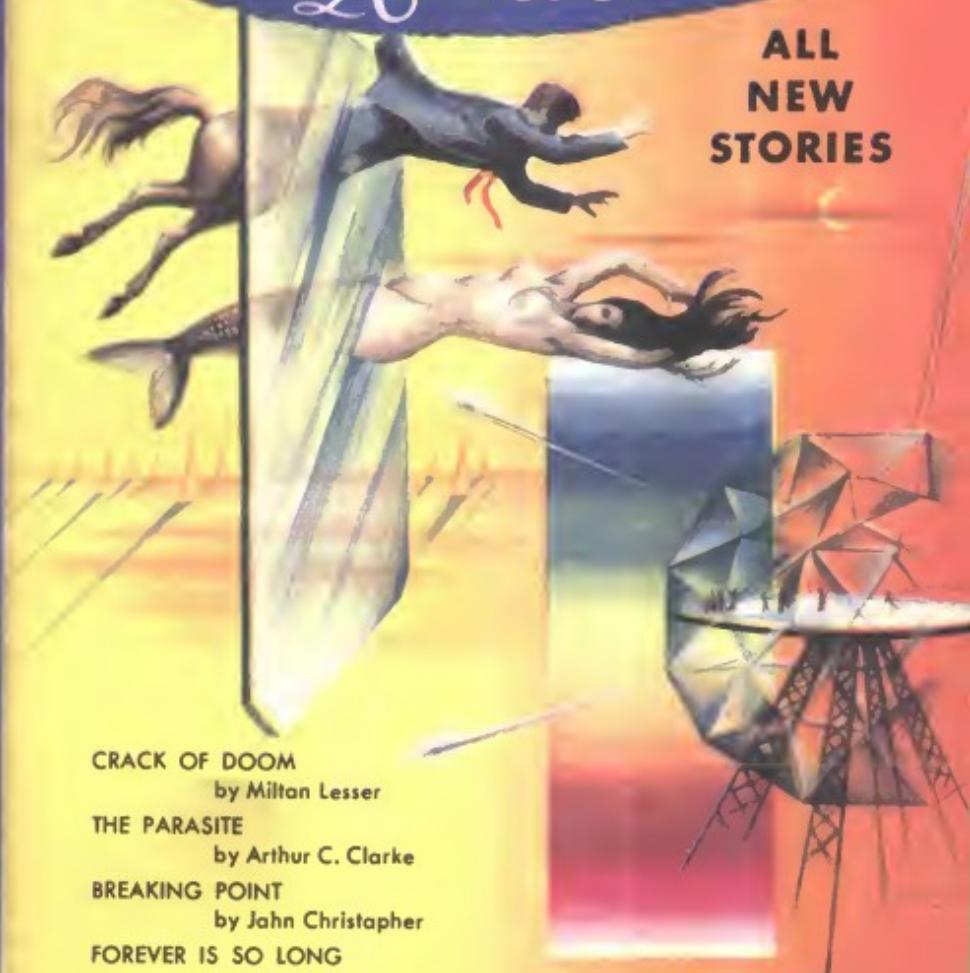
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# Avon SCIENCE FICTION and FANTASY Reader

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**CRACK OF DOOM**

by Milton Lesser

**THE PARASITE**

by Arthur C. Clarke

**BREAKING POINT**

by John Christopher

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by John Jakes

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by Jack Vance

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# Avon SCIENCE FICTION and FANTASY Reader



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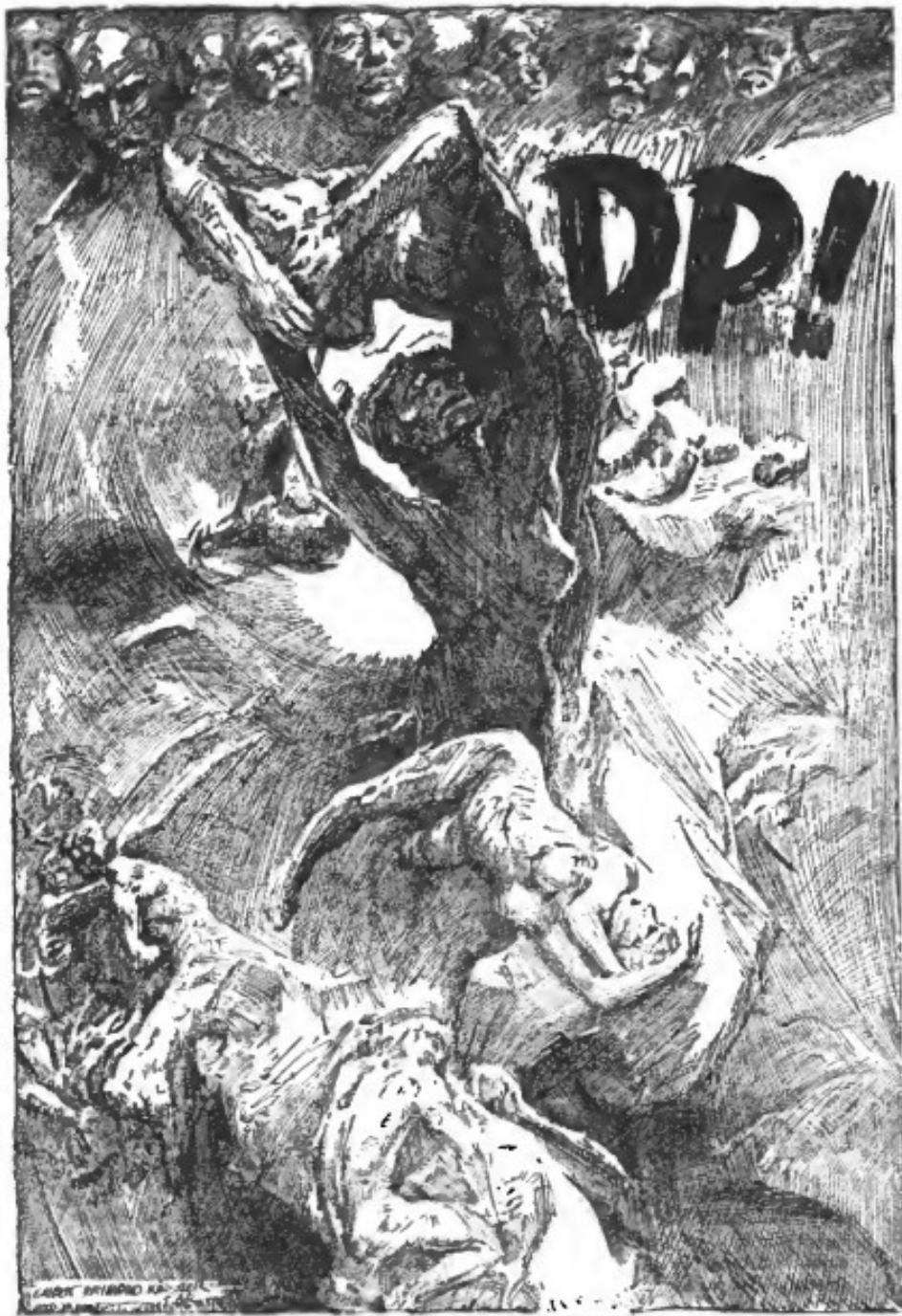
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Cover Illustration By Leo Manso





LIRE ET ENVOIER LA CARTE



Illustrator: Everett Raymond Kinstler

*The world had grown accustomed to the televised, newsreeled sight of stolid refugees plodding hopelessly away from calamity, belongings piled on their backs. The slaughter in which people had indulged with periodic regularity had blunted the fine edge of their humanity, made them less sensitive to the sufferings of others.*

*Anyhow, they told themselves, these DP's were different. . . .*

AN OLD WOODCUTTER WOMAN, hunting mushrooms up the north fork of the Kreuzberg, raised her eyes and saw the strangers. They came step by step through the ferns, arms extended, milk-blue eyes blank as clam shells. When they chanced into patches of sunlight, they cried out in hurt voices and clutched at their naked scalps, which were white as ivory, and netted with pale blue veins.



by JACK VANCE

The old woman stood like a stump, the breath scraping in her throat. She stumbled back, almost falling at each step, her legs moving back to support her at the last critical instant. The strange people came to a wavering halt, peering through sunlight and dark-green shadow. The woman took an hysterical breath, turned, and put her gnarled old legs to flight.

A hundred yards downhill she broke out on a trail; here she found her voice. She ran, uttering cracked screams and hoarse cries, lurching from side to side. She ran till she came to a wayside shrine, where she flung herself into a heap to gasp out prayer and frantic supplication.

Two woodsmen, in leather breeches and rusty black coats, coming up the path from Tedratz, stared at her in curiosity and amusement. She struggled to her knees, pointed up the trail. "Fiends from the pit! Walking in all their evil; with my two eyes I've seen them!"

"Come now," the older woodsman said indulgently. "You've had a drop or two, and it's not reverent to talk so at a holy place."

"I saw them," bellowed the old woman. "Naked as eggs and white as lard; they came running at me waving their arms, crying out for my very soul!"

"They had horns and tails?" the younger man asked jocularly. "They prodded you with their forks, switched you with their whips?"

"Ach, you blackguards! You laugh, you mock; go up the slope, and see for yourself. . . . Only five hundred meters, and then perhaps you'll mock!"

"Come along," said the first. "Perhaps someone's been plaguing the old woman; if so, we'll put him right."

They sauntered on, disappeared through the firs. The old woman rose to her feet, hobbled as rapidly as she could toward the village.

Five quiet minutes passed. She heard a clatter; the two woodsmen came running at breakneck speed down the path. "What now?" she quavered, but they pushed past her and ran shouting into Tedratz.

Half an hour later fifty men armed with rifles and shotguns stalked cautiously back up the trail, their dogs on leash. They passed the shrine; the dogs began to strain and growl.

"Up through here," whispered the older of the two woodsmen. They climbed the bank, threaded the firs, crossed sun-flooded meadows and balsam-scented shade.

From a rocky ravine, tinkling and chiming with a stream of glacier water, came the strange, sad voices.

The dogs snarled and moaned; the men edged forward, peered into the

meadow. The strangers were clustered under an overhanging ledge, clawing feebly into the dirt.

"Horrible things!" hissed the foremost man, "Like great potato-bugs!" He aimed his gun, but another struck up the barrel. "Not yet! Don't waste good powder; let the dogs hunt them down. If fiends they be, their spite will find none of us!"

The idea had merit; the dogs were loosed. They bounded forward, full of hate. The shadows boiled with fur and fangs and jerking white flesh.

One of the men jumped forward, his voice thick with rage. "Look, they've killed Tupp, my good old Tupp!" He raised his gun and fired, an act which became the signal for further shooting. And presently, all the strangers had been done to death, by one means or another.

Breathing hard, the men pulled off the dogs and stood looking down at the bodies. "A good job, whatever they are, man, beast, or fiend," said Johann Kirchner, the innkeeper. "But there's the point! What are they? When have such creatures been seen before?"

"Strange happenings for this earth; strange events for Austria!"

The men stared at the white tangle of bodies, none pushing too close, and now with the waning of urgency their mood became uneasy. Old Alois, the baker, crossed himself and, furtively examining the sky, muttered about the Apocalypse. Franz, the village atheist, had his reputation to maintain. "Demons," he asserted, "presumably would not succumb so easily to dog-bite and bullet; these must be refugees from the Russian zone, victims of torture and experimentation." Heinrich, the village Communist, angrily pointed out how much closer lay the big American lager near Innsbruck; this was the effect of Coca-Cola and comic books upon decent Austrians.

"Nonsense," snapped another. "Never an Austrian born of woman had such heads, such eyes, such skin. These things are something else. Salamanders!"

"Zombies," muttered another. "Corpses, raised from the dead."

Alois held up his hand. "Hist!"

Into the ravine came the pad and rustle of aimless steps, the forlorn cries of the troglodytes.

The men crouched back into the shadows; along the ridge appeared silhouettes, crooked, lumpy shapes feeling their way forward, recoiling from the shafts of sunlight.

Guns cracked and spat; once more the dogs were loosed. They bounded up the side of the ravine and disappeared.

Panting up the slope, the men came to the base of a great overhanging

cliff, and here they stopped short. The base of the cliff was broken open. Vague pale-eyed shapes waddled the gap, swaying, shuddering, resisting, moving forward inch by inch, step by step.

"Dynamite!" cried the men. "Dynamite, gasoline, fire!"

These measures were never put into effect. The commandant of the French occupation garrison arrived with three platoons. He contemplated the fissure, the oyster-pale faces, the oyster-shell eyes and threw up his hands. He dictated a rapid message for the Innsbruck headquarters, then required the villagers to put away their guns and depart the scene.

The villagers sullenly retired; the French soldiers, brave in their sky-blue shorts, gingerly took up positions; and with a hasty enclosure of barbed wire and rails restrained the troglodytes to an area immediately in front of the fissure.

\* \* \* \* \*

The April 18 edition of the *Innsbruck Kurier* included a skeptical paragraph: "A strange tribe of mountainside hermits, living in a Kreuzberg cave near Tedratz, was reported today. Local inhabitants profess the deepest mystification. The Tedratz constabulary, assisted by units of the French garrison, is investigating."

A rather less cautious account found its way into the channels of the wire services: "Innsbruck, April 19. A strange tribe has appeared from the recesses of the Kreuzberg near Innsbruck in the Tyrol. They are said to be hairless, blind, and to speak an incomprehensible language.

"According to unconfirmed reports, the troglodytes were attacked by terrified inhabitants of nearby Tedratz, and after bitter resistance were driven back into their caves.

"French occupation troops have sealed off the entire Kreuzertal. A spokesman for Colonel Courtin refuses either to confirm or deny that the troglodytes have appeared."

Bureau chiefs at the wire services looked long and carefully at the story. Why should French occupation troops interfere in what appeared on the face a purely civil disturbance? A secret colony of war criminals? Unlikely. What then? Mysterious race of troglodytes? Clearly hokum. What then? The story might develop, or it might go limp. In any case, on the late afternoon of April 19, a convoy of four cars started up the Kreuzertal, carrying reporters, photographers, and a member of the U.N. Minorities Commission, who by chance happened to be in Innsbruck.

The road to Tedratz wound among grassy meadows, story-book forests, in and out of little Alpine villages, with the massive snow-capped knob of the Kreuzberg gradually pushing higher into the sky.

At Tedratz, the party alighted and started up the now notorious trail, to be brought short almost at once at a barricade manned by French soldiers. Upon display of credentials the reporters and photographers were allowed to pass; the U.N. commissioner had nothing to show, and the NCO in charge of the barricade politely turned him back.

"But I am an official of the United Nations!" cried the outraged commissioner.

"That may well be," assented the NCO. "However, you are not a journalist, and my orders are uncompromising." And the angry commissioner was asked to wait in Tedratz until word would be taken to Colonel Courtin at the camp.

The commissioner seized on the word. "‘Camp’? How is this? I thought there was only a cave, a hole in the mountainside?"

The NCO shrugged. "Monsieur le Commissionnaire is free to conjecture as he sees best."

A private was told off as a guide; the reporters and photographers started up the trail, with the long, yellow afternoon light slanting down through the firs.

It was a jocular group; repartee and wise cracks were freely exchanged. Presently the party became winded, as the trail was steep and they were all out of condition. They stopped by the wayside shrine to rest. "How much farther?" asked a photographer.

The soldier pointed through the firs toward a tall buttress of granite. "Only a little bit; then you shall see."

Once more they set out and almost immediately passed a platoon of soldiers stringing barbed wire from tree to tree.

"This will be the third extension," remarked their guide over his shoulder. "Every day they come pushing up out of the rock. It is"—he selected a word—"formidable."

The jocularity and wise cracks died; the journalists peered through the firs, aware of the sudden coolness of the evening.

They came to the camp, and were taken to Colonel Courtin, a small man full of excitable motion. He swung his arm. "There, my friends, is what you came to see; look your fill, since it is through your eyes that the world must see."

For three minutes they stared, muttering to one another, while Courtin teetered on his toes.

"How many are there?" came an awed question.

"Twenty thousand by latest estimate, and they issue ever faster. All from that little hole." He jumped up on tiptoe, and pointed. "It is in-

credible; where do they fit? And still they come, like the objects a magician removes from his hat."

"But—do they eat?"

Courtin held out his hands. "Is it for me to ask? I furnish no food; I have none; my budget will not allow it. I am a man of compassion. If you will observe, I have hung the tarpaulins to prevent the sunlight."

"With that skin, they'd be pretty sensitive, eh?"

"Sensitive!" Courtin rolled up his eyes. "The sunlight burns them like fire."

"Funny that they're not more interested in what goes on."

"They are dazed, my friend. Dazed and blinded and completely confused."

"But—what *are* they?"

"That, my friend, is a question I am without resource to answer."

The journalists regained a measure of composure, and swept the enclosure with studiously impassive glances calculated to suggest, *we have seen so many strange sights that now nothing can surprise us.* "I suppose they're men," said one.

"But of course. What else?"

"What else indeed? But where do they come from? Lost Atlantis? The land of Oz?"

"Now then," said Colonel Courtin, "you make jokes. It is a serious business, my friends; where will it end?"

"That's the big question, Colonel. Whose baby is it?"

"I do not understand."

"Who takes responsibility for them? France?"

"No, no," cried Colonel Courtin. "You must not credit me with such a statement."

"Austria, then?"

Colonel Courtin shrugged. "The Austrians are a poor people. Perhaps—of course I speculate—your great country will once again share of its plenitude."

"Perhaps, perhaps not. The one man of the crowd who might have had something to say is down in Tedratz—the chap from the Minorities Commission."

\* \* \* \* \*

The story pushed everything from the front pages, and grew bigger day by day.

From the U.P. wire:

Innsbruck, April 23 (UP): The Kreuzberg miracle continues to confound the world. Today a record number of troglodytes pushed

through the gap, bringing the total surface population up to forty-six thousand. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

From the syndicated column, *Science Today* by Ralph Dunstable, for April 28:

The scientific world seethes with the troglodyte controversy. According to the theory most frequently voiced, the trogs are descended from cavemen of the glacial eras, driven underground by the advancing wall of ice. Other conjectures, more or less scientific, refer to the lost tribes of Israel, the fourth dimension, Armageddon, and Nazi experiments.

Linguistic experts meanwhile report progress in their efforts to understand the language of the trogs. Dr. Allen K. Mendelson of the Princeton Institute of Advanced Research, spokesman for the group, classifies the trog speech as "one of the agglutinatives, with the slightest possible kinship to the Basque tongue—so faint as to be highly speculative, and it is only fair to say that there is considerable disagreement among us on this point. The trogs, incidentally, have no words for 'sun,' 'moon,' 'fight,' 'bird,' 'animal,' and a host of other concepts we take for granted. 'Food' and 'fungus,' however, are the same word."

\* \* \* \* \*

From the *New York Herald Tribune*:

**TROGS HUMAN, CLAIM SAVANTS;  
INTERBREEDING POSSIBLE**

by Mollie Lemmon

*Milan*, April 30: Trogs are physiologically identical with surface humanity, and sexual intercourse between man and trog might well be fertile. Such was the opinion of a group of doctors and geneticists at an informal poll I conducted yesterday at the Milan Genetical Clinic, where a group of trogs are undergoing examination."

\* \* \* \* \*

From *The Trog Story*, a daily syndicated feature by Harlan B. Temple, April 31:

Today I saw the hundred thousandth trog push his way up out of the bowels of the Alps; everywhere in the world people are asking, where will it stop? I certainly have no answer. This tremendous migration, unparalleled since the days of Alaric the Goth, seems only just now shifting into high gear. Two new rifts have opened into the Kreuzberg; the trogs come shoving out in close ranks, faces blank as custard, and only God knows what is in their minds.

The camps—there are now six, interconnected like knots on a rope—extend down the hillside and into the Kreuzertal. Tarpaulins over the treetops give the mountainside, seen from a distance, the look of a lawn with handkerchiefs spread out to dry.

The food situation has improved considerably over the past three days, thanks to the efforts of the Red Cross, CARE, and FAO. The basic ration is a mush of rice, wheat, millet or other cereal, mixed with carrots, greens, dried eggs, and reinforced with vitamins; the trogs appear to thrive on it.

I cannot say that the trogs are a noble, enlightened, or even ingratiating race. Their cultural level is abysmally low; they possess no tools, they wear neither clothing nor ornaments. To their credit it must be said that they are utterly inoffensive and mild; I have never witnessed a quarrel or indeed seen a trog exhibit anything but passive obedience.

Still they rise in the hundreds and thousands. What brings them forth? Do they flee a subterranean Attila, some pandemonic Stalin? The linguists who have been studying the trog speech are close-mouthed, but I have it from a highly informed source that a report will be published within the next day or so. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Report to the Assembly of the U.N., May 4, by V. G. Hendlemann, Coordinator for the Committee of Associated Anthropologists:

"I will state the tentative conclusions to which this committee has arrived. The processes and inductions which have led to these conclusions are outlined in the appendix to this report.

"Our preliminary survey of the troglodyte language has convinced a majority of us that the trogs are probably the descendants of a group of European cave-dwellers who either by choice or by necessity took up underground residence at least fifty thousand, at most two hundred thousand, years ago.

"The trog which we see today is a result of evolution and mutation, and represents adaptation to the special conditions under which the trogs have existed. He is quite definitely of the species *homo sapiens*, with a cranial capacity roughly identical to that of surface man.

"In our conversations with the trogs we have endeavored to ascertain the cause of the migration. Not one of the trogs makes himself completely clear on the subject, but we have been given to understand that the great caves which the race inhabited have been stricken by a volcanic convulsion and are being gradually filled with lava. If this be the case the trogs are seen to become literally 'displaced persons.'

"In their former home the trogs subsisted on fungus grown in shallow 'paddies,' fertilized by their own wastes, finely pulverized coal, and warmed by volcanic heat.

"They have no grasp of 'time' as we understand the word. They have only the sparsest traditions of the past and are unable to conceive of a future further removed than two minutes. Since they exist in the present, they neither expect, hope, dread, nor otherwise take cognizance of what possibly may befall them.

"In spite of their deficiencies of cultural background, the trogs appear to have a not discreditable native intelligence. The committee agrees that a troglodyte child reared in ordinary surface surroundings, and given a typical education, might well become a valuable citizen, indistinguishable from any other human being except by his appearance."

\* \* \* \* \*

Excerpt from a speech by Porfirio Hernandez, Mexican delegate to the U.N. Assembly, on May 17:

"... We have ignored this matter too long. Far from being a scientific curiosity or a freak, this is a very human problem, one of the biggest problems of our day and we must handle it as such. The trogs are pressing from the ground at an ever-increasing rate; the Kreuzertal, or Kreuzer Valley, is inundated with trogs as if by a flood. We have heard reports, we have deliberated, we have made solemn noises, but the fact remains that every one of us is sitting on his hands. These people—we must call them people—must be settled somewhere permanently; they must be made self-supporting. This hot iron must be grasped; we fail in our responsibilities otherwise. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

Excerpt from a speech, May 19, by Sir Lyandras Chandryasam, delegate from India:

"... My esteemed colleague from Mexico has used brave words; he exhibits a humanitarianism that is unquestionably praiseworthy. But he puts forward no positive program. May I ask how many trogs have come to the surface, thus to be cared for? Is not the latest figure somewhere short of a million? I would like to point out that in India alone five million people yearly die of malnutrition or preventable disease; but no one jumps up here in the assembly to cry for a crusade to help these unfortunate victims of nature. No, it is this strange race, with no claim upon anyone, which has contributed nothing to the civilization of the world, which now we feel has first

call upon our hearts and purse-strings. I say, is not this a paradoxical circumstance. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

From a speech, May 20, by Dr. Karl Byrnisted, delegate from Iceland:

" . . . Sir Lyandras Chandryasam's emotion is understandable, but I would like to remind him that the streets of India swarm with millions upon millions of so-called sacred cattle and apes, who eat what and where they wish, very possibly the food to keep five million persons alive. The recurrent famines in India could be relieved, I believe, by a rationalistic dealing with these parasites, and by steps to make the new birth-control clinics popular, such a tax on babies. In this way, the Indian government, by vigorous methods, has it within its power to cope with its terrible problem. These trogs, on the other hand, are completely unable to help themselves; they are like babies flung fresh into a world where even the genial sunlight kills them. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

From a speech, May 21, by Porfirio Hernandez, delegate from Mexico:

"I have been challenged to propose a positive program for dealing with the trogs. . . . I feel that as an activating principle, each member of the U.N. agree to accept a number of trogs proportionate to its national wealth, resources, and density of population. . . . Obviously the exact percentages will have to be thrashed out elsewhere. . . . I hereby move the President of the Assembly appoint such a committee, and instruct them to prepare such a recommendation, said committee to report within two weeks.

(Motion defeated, 20 to 35)

\* \* \* \* \*

*The Trog Story*, June 2, by Harlan B. Temple:

"No matter how many times I walk through Trog Valley, the former Kreuzertal, I never escape a feeling of the profoundest bewilderment and awe. The trogs number now well over a million; yesterday they chiseled open four new openings into the outside world, and they are pouring out at the rate of thousands every hour. And everywhere is heard the question, where will it stop? Suppose the earth is a honeycomb, a hive, with more trogs than surface men?

"Sooner or later our organization will break down; more trogs will come up than it is within our power to feed. Organization already has failed to some extent. All the trogs are getting at least one meal a day, but not enough clothes, not enough shelter is being provided. Every day hundreds die from sunburn. I understand that the Old-

Clothes-for-Trogs drive has nowhere hit its quota; I find it hard to comprehend. Is there no feeling of concern or sympathy for these people merely because they do not look like so many chorus boys and screen starlets?"

\* \* \* \* \*

From the *Christian Science Monitor*:

### CONTROVERSIAL TROG BILL PASSES U. N. ASSEMBLY

*New York*, June 4: By a 35 to 20 vote—exactly reversing its first tally on the measure—the U. N. Assembly yesterday accepted the motion of Mexico's Hernandez to set up a committee for the purpose of recommending a percentage-wise distribution of trogs among member states.

Tabulation of voting on the measure found the Soviet bloc lined up with the United States and the British Commonwealth in opposition to the measure—presumably the countries which would be awarded large numbers of the trogs.

\* \* \* \* \*

Handbill passed out at rally of the Socialist Reich (Neo-Nazi) party at Bremen, West Germany, June 10:

### A NEW THREAT

COMRADES! It took a war to clean Germany of the Jews; must we now submit to an invasion of troglodyte filth? All Germany cries *no!* All Germany cries, hold our borders firm against these cretin moles! Send them to Russia; send them to the Arctic wastes! Let them return to their burrows; let them perish! But guard the Fatherland; guard the sacred German Soil!

(Rally broken up by police, handbills seized.)

\* \* \* \* \*

Letter to the *London Times*, June 18:

To the Editor:

I speak for a large number of my acquaintances when I say that the prospect of taking to ourselves a large colony of "troglodytes" awakens in me no feeling of enthusiasm. Surely England has troubles more than enough of its own, without the added imposition of an unassimilable and non-productive minority to eat our already meager rations and raise our already sky-high taxes.

Yours, etc.,

Sir Clayman Winifred, Bart.  
Lower Ditchley, Hants.

Letter to the *London Times*, June 21:

*To the Editor:*

Noting Sir Clayman Winifred's letter of June 18, I took a quick check-up of my friends and was dumbfounded to find how closely they hew to Sir Clayman's line. Surely this isn't our tradition, not to get under the load and help lift with everything we've got? The troglodytes are human beings, victims of a disaster we have no means of appreciating. They must be cared for, and if a qualified committee of experts sets us a quota, I say, let's bite the bullet and do our part.

The Ameriphobe section of our press takes great delight in baiting our cousins across the sea for the alleged denial of civil rights to the Negroes—which, may I add, is present in its most violent and virulent form in a country of the British Commonwealth: the Union of South Africa. What do these journalists say to evidences of the same unworthy emotion here in England?

Yours, etc.,

J. C. T. Harrodsmerne

Tisley-on-Thames, Sussex.

\* \* \* \* \*

Headline in the *New York Herald Tribune*, June 22:

FOUR NEW TROG CAMPS OPENED;  
POPULATION AT TWO MILLION

\* \* \* \* \*

Letter to the *London Times*, June 24:

*To the Editor:*

I read the letter of J. C. T. Harrodsmerne in connection with the trog controversy with great interest. I think that in his praiseworthy efforts to have England do its bit, he is overlooking a very important fact: namely, we of England are a close-knit people, of clear clean vigorous blood, and admixture of any nature could only be for the worse. I know Mr. Harrodsmerne will be quick to say, no admixture is intended. But mistakes occur, and as I understand a man-trog union to be theoretically fertile, in due course there would be a number of little half-breeds scampering like rats around our gutters, a bad show all around. There are countries where this type of mongrelization is accepted: the United States, for instance, boasts that it is the "melting pot." Why not send the trogs to the wide open spaces of the U. S. where there is room and to spare, and where they can "melt" to their heart's content?

Yours, etc.,

Col. G. P. Barstaple (Ret.), Queens Own Hussars.  
Mide Hill, Warwickshire.

Letter to the *London Times*, June 28:

*To the Editor:*

Contrasting the bank accounts, the general air of aliveness of mongrel U. S. A. and non-mongrel England, I say maybe it might do us good to trade off a few retired colonels for a few trogs extra to our quota. Here's to more and better mongrelization!

Yours, etc.,

(Miss) Elizabeth Darrow Brown  
London, S. W.

\* \* \* \* \*

*The Frog Story*, June 30, by Harlan B. Temple:

"Will it come as a surprise to my readers if I say the trog situation is getting out of hand? They are coming not slower but faster; every day we have more trogs and every day we have more at a greater rate than the day before. If the sentence sounds confused it only reflects my state of mind.

"Something has got to be done.

"Nothing is being done.

"The wrangling that is going on is a matter of public record. Each country is liberal with advice but with little else. Sweden says, send them to the center of Australia; Australia points to Greenland; Denmark would prefer the Ethiopian uplands; Ethiopia politely indicates Mexico; Mexico says, much more room in Arizona; and at Washington senators from below the Mason-Dixon Line threaten to filibuster from now till Kingdom Come rather than admit a single trog to the continental limits of the U. S. Thank the Lord for an efficient food administration! The U. N. and the world at large can be proud of the organization by which the trogs are being fed.

"Incidental Notes: trog babies are being born—over fifty yesterday."

\* \* \* \* \*

From the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

### REDS OFFER HAVEN TO TROGS PROPOSAL STIRS WORLD

*New York*, July 3: Ivan Pudestov, the USSR's chief delegate to the U. N. Assembly, today blew the trog question wide open with a proposal to take complete responsibility for the trogs.

The offer startled the U. N. and took the world completely by surprise, since heretofore the Soviet delegation has held itself aloof from the bitter trog controversy, apparently in hopes that the free world would split itself apart on the problem. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Editorial in the *Milwaukee Journal*, July 5, headed "A Question of Integrity":

At first blush the Russian offer to take the trogs appears to ease our shoulders of a great weight. Here is exactly what we have been grasping for, a solution without sacrifice, a sop to our consciences, a convenient carpet to sweep our dirt under. The man in the street, and the responsible official, suddenly are telling each other that perhaps the Russians aren't so bad after all, that there's a great deal of room in Siberia, that the Russians and the trogs are both barbarians and really not so much different, that the trogs were probably Russians to begin with, etc.

Let's break the bubble of illusion, once and for all. We can't go on forever holding our Christian integrity in one hand and our inclinations in the other. . . . Doesn't it seem an odd coincidence that while the Russians are desperately short of uranium miners at the murderous East German and Ural pits, the trogs, accustomed to life underground, might be expected to make a good labor force? . . . In effect, we would be turning over to Russia millions of slaves to be worked to death. We have rejected forced repatriation in West Europe and Korea, let's reject forced patriation and enslavement of the trogs.

\* \* \* \* \*

Headline in the *New York Times*, July 20:

**REDS BAN U. N. SUPERVISION OF TROG COMMUNITIES  
SOVEREIGNTY ENDANGERED, SAYS PUDESTOV  
ANGRILY WITHDRAWS TROG OFFER**

\* \* \* \* \*

Headline in the *New York Daily News*, July 26:

**BELGIUM OFFERS CONGO FOR TROG HABITATION  
ASKS FUNDS TO RECLAIM JUNGLE  
U. N. GIVES QUALIFIED NOD**

\* \* \* \* \*

From *The Trog Story*, July 28, by Harlan B. Temple:

Four million (give or take a hundred thousand) trogs now breathe surface air. The Kreuzertal camps now constitute one of the world's largest cities, ranking under New York, London, Tokyo. The formerly peaceful Tyrolean valley is now a vast array of tarpaulins, circus tents, quonset huts, water tanks, and general disorder. Trog City doesn't smell too good either.

"Today might well mark the high tide in what the Austrians are calling 'the invasion from hell.' Trog still push through a dozen gaps ten abreast, but the pressure doesn't seem so intense. Every once in a

while a space appears in the ranks, where formerly they came packed like asparagus in crates. Another difference: the first trogs were meaty and fairly well nourished. These late arrivals are thin and ravenous. Whatever strange subterranean economy they practiced, it seems to have broken down completely. . . ."

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From *The Trog Story*, August 1, by Harlan B. Temple:

"Something horrible is going on under the surface of the earth. Trogs are staggering forth with raw stumps for arms, with great wounds. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

From *The Trog Story*, August 8, by Harlan B. Temple:

"Operation Exodus got underway today. One thousand Trogs departed the Kreuzertal bound for their new home near Cabinda, at the mouth of the Congo River. Trucks and buses took them to Innsbruck, where they will board special trains to Venice and Trieste. Here ships supplied by the U. S. Maritime Commission will take them to their new home.

"As one thousand trogs departed Trog City, twenty thousand pushed up from their underground homeland, and camp officials are privately expressing concern over conditions. Trog City has expanded double, triple, ten times over the original estimates. The machinery of supply, sanitation and housing is breaking down. From now on, any attempts to remedy the situation are at best stopgaps, like adhesive tape on a rotten hose, when what is needed is a new hose or, rather, a four-inch pipe.

"Even to maintain equilibrium, thirty thousand trogs per day will have to be siphoned out of the Kreuzertal camps, an obvious impossibility under present budgets and efforts. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

From *Newsweek*, August 14:

Camp Hope, in the bush near Cabinda, last week took on the semblance of the Guadalcanal army base during World War II. There was the old familiar sense of massive confusion, the grind of bulldozers, sweating white, beet-red, brown and black skins, the raw earth dumped against primeval vegetation, bugs, salt tablets, Atabrine. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

From the U. P. wire:

Cabinda, Belgian Congo, August 20 (UP): The first contingent of trogs landed last night under shelter of dark, and marched to tem-

porary quarters, under the command of specially trained group captains.

Liaison officers state that the trogs are overjoyed at the prospect of a permanent home, and show an eagerness to get to work. According to present plans, they will till collective farms, and continuously clear the jungle for additional settlers.

On the other side of the ledger, it is rumored that the native tribesmen are showing unrest. Agitators, said to be Communist-inspired, are preying on the superstitious fears of a people themselves not far removed from savagery. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Headline in the *New York Times*, August 22:

### CONGO WARRIORS RUN AMOK AT CAMP HOPE KILL 800 TROG SETTLERS IN SINGLE HOUR

Military Law Established  
Belgian Governor Protests  
Says Congo Unsuitable

\* \* \* \* \*

*From the U. P. Wire:*

*Trieste*, August 23 (UP): Three shiploads of trogs bound for Trog-land in the Congo today marked a record number of embarkations. The total number of trogs to sail from European ports now stands at 24,965. . . .

*Cabinda*, August 23 (UP): The warlike Matemba Confederation is practically in a stage of revolt against further trop immigration, while Resident-General Bernard Cassou professes grave pessimism over eventualities.

*Mont Blanc*, August 24 (UP): Ten trogs today took up experimental residence in a ski-hut to see how well trogs can cope with the rigors of cold weather.

Announcement of this experiment goes to confirm a rumor that Denmark has offered Greenland to the trogs if it is found that they are able to survive Arctic conditions.

*Cabinda*, August 28 (UP): The Congo, home of witch-doctors, tribal dances, cannibalism and Tarzan, seethes with native unrest. Sullen anger smolders in the villages, riots are frequent and dozens of native workmen at Camp Hope have been killed or hospitalized.

Needless to say, the trogs, whose advent precipitated the crisis, are segregated far apart from contact with the natives, to avoid a repetition of the bloodbath of August 22. . . .

*Cabinda*, August 29 (UP): Resident-General Bernard Cassou today refused to allow debarkation of trogs from four ships standing off Cabina roadstead.

*Mont Blanc*, September 2 (UP): The veil of secrecy at the experimental trog home was lifted a significant crack this morning, when the bodies of two trogs were taken down to Chamonix via the ski-lift. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

From *The Trog Story*, September 10, by Harlan B. Temple:

'It is one A.M.; I've just come down from Camp No. 4. The trog columns have dwindled to a straggle of old, crippled, diseased. The stench is frightful. . . . But why go on? Frankly, I'm heartsick. I wish I had never taken on this assignment. It's doing something terrible to my soul; my hair is literally turning gray. I pause a moment, the noise of my typewriter stops, I listen to the vast murmur through the Kreuzertal; despondency, futility, despair come at me in a wave. Most of us here at Trog City, I think, feel the same.'

"There are now five or six million trogs in the camp; no one knows the exact count; no one even cares. The situation has passed that point. The flow has dwindled, one merciful dispensation—in fact, at Camp No. 4 you can hear the rumble of the lava rising into the trog caverns.

"Morale is going from bad to worse here at Trog City. Every day a dozen of the unpaid volunteers throw up their hands, and go home. I can't say as I blame them. Lord knows they've given the best they have, and no one backs them up. Everywhere in the world it's the same story, with everyone pointing at someone else. It's enough to make a man sick. In fact it has. I'm sick—desperately sick."

"But you don't read *The Trog Story* to hear me gripe. You want factual reporting. Very well, here it is. Big news today was that movement of trogs out of the camp to Trieste has been held up pending clarification of the Congo situation. Otherwise, everything's the same here—hunger, smell, careless trogs dying of sunburn. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

Headline in the *New York Times*, September 20:

TROG QUOTA PROBLEM RETURNED TO  
STUDY GROUP FOR ADJUSTMENT

\* \* \* \* \*

From the U. P. Wire:

*Cabinda*, September 25 (UP): Eight ships, loaded with 9,462 trog refugees, still wait at anchor, as native chieftains reiterated their opposition to trog immigration. . . .

*Trog City*, October 8 (UP): The trog migration is at its end. Yesterday for the first time no new trogs came up from below, leaving the estimated population of Trog City at six million.

*New York*, October 13 (UP): Deadlock still grips the Trog Resettlement Committee, with the original positions, for the most part, unchanged. Densely populated countries claim they have no room and no jobs; the underdeveloped states insist that they have not enough money to feed their own mouths. The U. S., with both room and money, already has serious minority headaches and doesn't want new ones. . . .

*Chamonix*, France, October 18 (UP): The Trog Experimental Station closed its doors yesterday, with one survivor of the original ten trogs riding the ski-lift back down the slopes of Mont Blanc.

Dr. Sven Emeldson, director of the station, released the following statement: "Our work proves that the trogs, even if provided shelter adequate for a European, cannot stand the rigors of the North; they seem especially sensitive to pulmonary ailments. . . ."

*New York*, October 26 (UP): After weeks of acrimony, a revised set of trog immigration quotas was released for action by the U. N. Assembly. Typical figures are: USA 31%, USSR 16%, Canada 8%, Australia 8%, France 6%, Mexico 6%.

*New York*, October 30 (UP): The USSR adamantly rejects the principle of U.N. checking of the trog resettlement areas inside the USSR. . . .

*New York*, October 31 (UP): Senator Bullrod of Mississippi today promised to talk till his "lungs came out at the elbows" before he would allow the Trog Resettlement Bill to come to a vote before the Senate. An informal check revealed insufficient strength to impose cloture. . . .

*St. Arlberg, Austria*, November 5 (UP): First snow of the season fell last night. . . .

*Trog City*, November 10 (UP): Last night, frost lay a sparkling sheath across the valley. . . .

*Trog City*, November 15 (UP): Trog sufferers from influenza have been isolated in a special section. . . .

*Buenos Aires*, November 23 (UP): Dictator Peron today flatly refused to meet the Argentine quota of relief supplies to Trog City until some definite commitment has been made by the U.N. . . .

*Trog City*, December 2 (UP): Influenza following the snow and rain of the last week has made a new onslaught on the trogs; camp

authorities are desperately trying to cope with the epidemic. . . .

*Trog City*, December 8 (UP): Two crematoriums, fired by fuel oil, are roaring full time in an effort to keep ahead of the mounting influenza casualties. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

From *The Trog Story*, December 13, by Harlan B. Temple:

"This is it. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

From the U.P. Wire:

*Los Angeles*, December 14 (UP): The Christmas buying rush got under way early this year, in spite of unseasonably bad weather. . . .

*Trog City*, December 15 (UP): A desperate appeal for penicillin, sulfa, blankets, kerosene heaters, and trained personnel was sounded today by Camp Commandant Howard Kerkovits. He admitted that disease among the trogs was completely out of control, beyond all human power to cope with. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

From *The Trog Story*, December 23, by Harlan B. Temple:

"I don't know why I should be sitting here writing this, because—since there are no more trogs—there is no more *trog story*. But I am seized by an irresistible urge to 'tell-off' a rotten, inhumane world. . . ."





Illustrator:  
Mort Lawrence

*Thousands of tourists walked through the caves at Aupergne, oohing and aahing at the crude drawings on the prehistoric stone walls. There were pictures of the buffalo, the mammoth, the early rhinoceros, and a bird-headed, rat-tailed man! The style of the work was artistic, and it amazed everyone that the imaginative, creative spark could have glimmered in so gross a thing as the animalistic caveman.*

*But Hillary Kiffer wasn't surprised. . . .*

## *The Rather Improbable History of Hillary Kiffer*

by WILLIAM VINE

THIS IS A FANTASTIC STORY, and not in the best of taste.

Before the discovery of the caves at Aupergne, Hillary Kiffer was an artist—chiefly in oils, though he put his hand on occasion to water colors, tempera, wood-cuts, scraper board, crayon, and white chalk—whose reputation did not extend beyond a radius of two miles from Belsize Park tube station. He painted enthusiastically and unprofitably about one and a half transitions behind Picasso. He had reached the distinction of public notice only once; when he was charged, convicted and fined ten shillings for throwing a tomato at a ceremony presided over by Sir Alfred Munnings. In point of fact, he missed Sir Alfred, from a range of five yards.

When a Provencal courting couple, amorously nesting in the ivied roots of an old oak, found themselves precipitated some distance below the earth into what later became known as the Venus Grotto, it was Hillary's great good fortune to be at the time on a walking tour in the district. He was actually staying at the solitary inn in the village to which the couple returned on the evening of their adventure and heard their story at first hand. The next day he joined the party consisting of the more adventurous local lads which went, equipped with ropes and lanterns, to make a fuller exploration. And it was a lantern held in his own hand that illuminated, for the first time in what was subsequently estimated to be between forty and eighty-five thousand years, the Painted Wall, in the Kiffer Gallery.

Opportunity is notorious for the suddenness and transience of its appearances; there are few who take the best advantage of those breathless moments when Fate pitches them up to the crest of the wave and lets them choose their course. But Hillary was one of those few. He seized his chance. Within twenty-four hours he had tricked the farmer, under whose land the cavern lay, into parting with his property against a promissory note; within a week his (signed) reports on the fabulous quality of the new cave paintings were being buzzingly discussed in the highest literary and artistic quarters of progressive world society (not to mention a full column by Chapman Pincher in the *Daily Express*); within a month he was entertaining photographers from *Life*, *Look*, *See*, *Shuftee* and *Picture Post*. The Kiffer reputation was thoroughly launched.

And once launched, Hillary kept it well afloat. The main grottos and caverns—five difficult but traversable miles of stalactite and stalagmite and excitingly noisy underground water—were a very neat business proposition, especially since they were just the right distance off the beaten tourists' path. Hilary built a restaurant, and later a hotel, being careful to retain the original oak tree, appropriately labeled, on the edge of one of the tennis courts. Financially he was safe. Artistically, the Kiffer Gallery was a mine whose treasures he tossed to the world warily and at discreet intervals. Five years after the finding he published his monumental work: "The Aupergne Paintings—a Study," 442 pp., 210 plates, imp. 4to, 85/-; soon affectionately known as Kiffer's Aupergne. The seal had been set.

The undeniably fantastic element in this story occurred on the morning Hillary had received, from his clipping agency, a full page neatly scissored out of the *Times Literary Supplement*. It was the off season and, in point of fact, the caverns were closed pending work on an extension. Hillary, on his own, walked down the new, gently sloping entrance that had been constructed, through the Venus Grotto, and into the Kiffer Gallery. Switching on the discreet fluorescent lighting, he went across and examined, for possibly the hundred thousandth time, the Painted Wall.

He knew it now by heart, but, surrounded by the eerie rumble and swirl of the underground streams, he examined it all again. The buffalo charging, the buffalo sitting, the mammoth and the buffalo, the seeming-rhinoceros which had so excited the naturalists and geologists, and the exquisite cameo scene in which the bird-headed, rat-tailed man was apparently leap-frogging over two buffaloes and a mountain. And right at the bottom the strangely distinctive mark that looked like nothing so much as a set of rugby goal-posts. Hillary got down to his knees, to look at it.



Outside the thunder storm had rolled up with incredible swiftness. Almost before the first heavy rain drops fell the great bolt of lightning had arced down towards Aupergne. It leaped for a tree, split it to its roots and, without pause, hurtled yet farther down to its final earthing.

Hillary rolled over, pole-axed.

He recovered consciousness to a meaningless babble of voices. He was lying on rock, and there was dim light about him. He peered up. A group of what could only charitably be described as men surrounded him; they had brutish faces and were dressed in various and, from the smell, not very carefully-cured skins. Beyond them the scene was frighteningly familiar; possibly the stalagmite on the left was half an inch or an inch shorter, and there was certainly, from the light and the freshness of the air, an opening to the outside not far round the gallery's bend, but it was the Kiffer Gallery all right.

Hillary, as has been indicated, had a shrewd-enough brain. The truth was incredible and shocking, but it was the truth. He, Hillary Kiffer, had been

precipitated, by some phenomenon, thousands of years backwards through time. He glanced behind him.

The Painted Wall was blank.

It is in the famous Chapter Seven of Kiffer's *Aupergne* that the role and status of the tribal artist is so illuminatingly and exhaustively discussed. As the author conclusively demonstrates, the painter was the magician, and the magician was the king. There could be no doubt at all that the man capable of such potent enchantments must be venerated, indeed worshiped by his savage but enthusiastic fellows.

It was the awareness of this that kept Hillary going, in the face of the dreadful thought that all his comforts and all his reputation were now irrevocably set many tens of thousands of years in the future. It cheered him as he gagged over the highly suspicious and barely half cooked stew into which he had to plunge his fingers with the rest. Without delay he began the search for materials. Fortunately paint was very much in evidence; every male member of the tribe was abundantly decorated with those blue and red pigments whose subtlety had earned them a chapter to themselves in Kiffer's *Aupergne*. The question of the brush, or brushes, had been worth fifteen pages, too. Hillary smiled wryly as he solved it finally. The brush was an antique shaving brush, which he was in the habit of carrying around with him for brushing dandruff off his collar. At any rate, he was equipped. As, under the interested gaze of the tribe, he marched back into the cave, his eye caught a nubile cave wench with a face considerably less ape-like than the rest. Given a wash . . . But first to earn the title.

This presented no difficulty at all. After more than five years of study there was not a contour of the famous paintings that Hillary did not know intimately. He dashed them off without hesitation. At frequent intervals he was aware of members of the tribe respectfully watching him from behind. When he went out to join the communal meals the others all stood back until he had had his fill of the most tender morsels in the pot. At night he was given the warmest skins, and soon slept soundly in them, forgetting their odor. Day by day he continued with his task of painting on the wall the paintings he had studied thousands of years later, in the twentieth century.

After little more than a week he had finished. One last touch, and the cryptic vignette of bird-headed, rat-tailed man, two buffaloes and mountain was completed.

Now would come the accolade. Complete authority—a divinity, if only

a minor one. Clearly this life was not going to be so bad as his first fears had depicted it. Lacking some of the luxuries of the twentieth century, perhaps, but the twentieth century had never offered such opportunities for power, either. Why confine things to one small tribe? As king-god, with the superior intelligence of civilized man, he could lead his people to unimaginable conquests. Yes, the future was very bright.

And—the impish thought striking him—why not a message to the world he had left? Why not sign what was undoubtedly his greatest masterpiece. He began to scrawl his name—Hillary Kiffer. He had written the initial letter—like a set of rugby goal-posts, when he became aware again of figures behind him. He turned. Differentially—but insistently—the chief, always identifiable by the great flint knife slung on his left side, was beckoning him outwards.

The moment, Hillary realized, was at hand. Now would come the ceremony, and the enthronement. The rest of the signature could wait. He walked out nonchalantly. At the cave mouth the particularly attractive girl dropped a garland of flowers over his head. The rest of the tribe were spread out in a crescent. The chief led him to the center of it. The crowd gave a low murmur. The chief bent his knees, preparatory to kneeling before the god Kiffer. Hillary, with debonair detachment, gazed out over their heads towards the distant hills. The chief bent his great, hairy knees still further before him.

And then, lunging upwards with his great flint knife, he carefully and swiftly disemboweled the tribal artist.





Illustrator:  
John Giunta

*The gray men had come from an unknown place to overrun the earth. They killed without passion, in much the same manner as the earthlings would exterminate ants to reclaim a hill for planting.*

*And amid the slaughter a small boy looked to his father for guidance. But the man knew that in the face of motorized legions there was only one legacy a parent could leave—so he gave his son a gun. . . .*

## *Survivor*

by IRVING E. COX, JR.

HE STOOD STILL LISTENING. In the distance he heard the unmistakable shrill whine of high-speed motors. He looked wildly for a way of escape, and saw none. The highway at that point wound under the bare overhang of brown cliffs, sheer and naked in the pale sunlight.

He might have climbed the sharp face of rock if he had not been so exhausted. But his body was tortured with fatigue and pain. His clothes were in tatters. His feet and arms were latticed with a livid network of wounds. The long cut in his cheek had stopped bleeding, but the caking scab pulsed in rhythm with his heartbeat.

The roaring motors swept closer, so near that the earth shook. Choked with panic, he began to run. He sprawled over a jagged rock, and the gravel sandpapered the skin from his kneecaps.

The sudden pain cleared his head. He realized that it was a mere animal instinct to try to outrun the caravan; but he had a slim chance for safety if he hid in the tangled shrubs that choked the swamp on the other side of the road.

He darted across the ribbon of cement and plunged into the thicket. Hard twigs and thorns tore at his skin. His feet splashed into the fetid, black slime, and muddy water oozed reluctantly over his legs.

His head was in a nest of tall grass. To his right the swamp curved along the road for a quarter of a mile. Above it two huge, black birds swept the sky in a solemn circle. Much closer, a dozen small marshbirds danced and chattered on the edge of a decaying log.

The roar of motors was deafening as the caravan rounded the bend. Only a thin whisper of rationality kept him from running. As he had once before, he clenched his fists until the tattered nails broke the skin; and over and over he whispered a kind of litany of sanity:

"I am Vernon Randall Hume. V. R. Hume, corporation lawyer. V. R. Hume; age, thirty-five; happily married; the father of three children. I am Vernon Randall Hume. I have not lost my mind. Yesterday I had lunch at the Athletic Club. Only yesterday!" The word was a symbol, rather than an accurate measure of time. It stood for another life, another reality. Hume was not sure whether it had been two days or a year ago. Yesterday was simply then; this was now—this clanking column of gray death moving over a dead landscape.

He could not look at the clattering vehicles; and it was impossible to turn his eyes away. They were not thirty feet from him, the roaring black machines and the glittering guns that saluted the empty sky. In every vehicle were crowded rows of gray-faced men in gray uniforms. They sat erect and motionless, obedient automatons.

Suddenly Hume heard a splashing in the swamp behind him. He turned his head and saw a white-robed figure fighting free of the slime—a woman who had been hiding in the thick brush. Apparently her reason had been shattered by terror, and she could not control her lashing instinct to run.

A driver signaled. The caravan stopped. The gray men stood up. Languidly their guns were lowered, shimmering like silver lances in the sunlight. Screaming, the woman floundered in the mud, her long hair pulled free in the wind.

The guns jumped and the blue smoke hung for a moment over the caravan. The woman clawed at the air in agony before slumping back into the slime. The gray men turned in unison, shouldered their arms, and sat down. The motors roared and the caravan moved on.

Slowly the noise died and the air was quiet again.

Hume stood up. His wet clothing clung to his skin, and in the sharp air each tiny laceration felt like a fresh wound. His feet were numb chunks of flesh, slithering in the mud as he walked.

He stopped beside the woman. She lay face up in the black mud, her frayed dress billowed by the shallow water, her hands clutching at the gaping wound torn in her breast.

Without knowing quite why he did, Hume knelt and kissed her lips. They were still warm. Then he understood. She was like Beth, another symbol of yesterday. Even this much of a parting had been denied him in that first blazing destruction.

His soul screaming with the pain of remembering, he turned and fled, plunging awkwardly through the swamp. When he reached dry ground on the other side, he collapsed, retching emptily. The nausea swept up around him. He lost consciousness.

*The boy and his father came to the cliff overlooking the road. Cautiously they inspected the empty landscape. The father pointed toward the ragged chain of mountains, hazy blue on the horizon. "The river is on the other side of the ridge," he said. "We can hide in the swamp until it's dark again." They slid down the bank and ran across the highway.*

It was dusk when Hume regained consciousness. The rim of the distant mountains was pink against a purple sky and the floor of the valley was dark, streaked here and there with mist. How much farther was it? Ten miles? He had no way of knowing. Yesterday, in his own car, he could have reached the pass in less than an hour; it was a magnificent highway. He had never understood distances except in terms of time.

He knew it was dangerous to follow the road, and yet he was still afraid to strike out across the desert. He hadn't the slightest conception of the distance a man might walk in twenty-four hours, and he knew he had to forage for both food and water. There might be small animals of a sort on the desert. A clever man might trap one and kill it, but Hume's cleverness was limited to the manipulation of words in legal controversy.

He was sustained by no hope except the sight of the chain of hills, and his consuming determination to reach them alive. Once Hume had defended a client by utilizing the logic of self-defense. "Take away all that a man possesses," he had said; "throw out all the comforts and gadgets of civilization, and face an individual with the one issue of personal survival—a choice between life and death—and he cannot choose the latter. His choice is neither heroic nor romantic; it is simply instinctive."

Now, for the first time in his life, Hume understood what he had been talking about.

The motorized caravans could not have penetrated the mountains yet; and Hume's own people were on the other side, beyond the river. It was the only solid reality he had to cling to; it had the inevitability of tomorrow's sunrise.

After nightfall, Hume moved closer to the highway and plodded ahead more rapidly, less afraid in the dark. Pangs of hunger gnawed at his stomach, but it was a subordinate sensation, hard-ridden by the more intensive will to survive. He even took a certain wry comfort in his feeling of lightheadedness, for it diminished the constant pain crying against his nerves.

A pale half-moon rose. Close to the road Hume saw a frame farmhouse. There was a chance he could find food there, and possibly fresh water and clothing. Even though he knew the house would be deserted, he

approached it cautiously. For almost a quarter of an hour he huddled in the shelter of a lilac bush at the corner of the yard before he mustered up enough courage to go inside.

He walked across the manicured path, his battered shoes crunching softly on the white gravel. The house had not been untenanted long enough for the neglect to be obvious. The grass was still clipped short, and the sharply defined borders around the row of tree roses might have been made only an hour ago. But there were little signs of desertion: occasional blades of fast-growing weeds, a bush or two bowed with dead blooms that should have been pruned away, and a semicircular crescent torn in the earth by heavy metal treads.

Close to the porch the twisted body of a woman lay on the ground, cradled in a bed of white-faced pansies. The body was seared black, almost unrecognizable as anything once human. Beyond her, frozen fast to a pillar of the porch, was the charred corpse of a man.

The paint on the front of the house was blistered, still smelling faintly of fire. The gray men had used their flame guns here, Hume realized, caressing the face of the house with a terrifying white heat, like the kiss of a naked sun.

Hume went up the steps and entered the house. In the front room were trunks and boxes, partly filled, which the man and woman had obviously been packing when the caravan of gray men came. Hume pawed through the stacks of things, but found no clothing that he could use. The farmer had tried to escape with possessions which had yesterday's values—silverware, good china, books, silks, and fancy linens.

The practical clothing that Hume needed would still be somewhere upstairs; but before he explored for it, Hume went to the kitchen seeking food.

He found canned goods stacked in a cabinet. With trembling fingers he ground two cans open under the wall opener. He gulped a pint of condensed soup and a can of peaches; and he became promptly sick. When his weakness had subsided, he tried again, eating more slowly. There was no water running through the faucet. He had hardly expected it to be, and he would have been afraid to drink any if it had. But he managed to slake his thirst by draining the juice from another can of fruit.

Something faintly reminiscent of well-being filled his body. He leaned back in a kitchen chair and propped his tired feet on the white-topped table, scraping away the black mud with the point of a knife.

He heard the hum of an approaching motor and was seized again with

terror. He pulled himself up to the narrow kitchen window and peered out.

A treaded vehicle clanked to a stop and three searchlights pinpointed the house in the darkness. Hume crouched back against the cold wall, his breath icing his throat. Squads of gray men lined up on either side of the lights, and a leader bellowed a volley of orders at the face of the building. They waited. The command was repeated. After another pause, the gray men began to fire their weapons into the house.

Hume slid inside the narrow cubicle beneath the sink, where the porcelain gave him some protection from the falling glass and the crumbling plaster. The darkness glowed with the scarlet plumes of deadly explosives; but, in two minutes, it was over. The searchlights went off; the truck crunched on into silence.

The house was a riddled shambles, tottering with unexpected senility. Yet it had not caught fire. Hume picked his way carefully through the debris and up the swaying stairway to the second floor.

A section of the wall at the head of the stairway gaped open and Hume looked out into the valley. The mountains were clearly detailed in the cold moonlight. He traced the curve of the highway as it wound over the desert toward the pass, and he saw the sprawling oval of the single valley town, which yesterday had cast the pleasant reflection of lighted streets against the night sky. Now the rows of homes and stores were a dead, bleak cancer rising on the desert. On the outskirts of the village was a blaze of intermingled searchlights marking the place where the gray men had set up an outpost camp.

The town was at the point of a triangle. The entrance to the mountain pass, Hume saw, was directly across the desert. If he went that way, using the peaks as a guide, he would reach safety much sooner, and he would avoid the danger of passing close to the camp of the gray men. His fear of crossing the desert on foot suddenly vanished before the security it offered.

The two bedrooms at the front of the farmhouse were shot away, but at the rear of the hall Hume found a storage closet. He pried the door open. Inside were long racks of clothing. Ecstatically Hume fingered the solid comfort of a woolen coat.

But his pleasure was fleeting. He heard footsteps on the gravel outside. Looking down through the torn wall, he saw a tall figure moving boldly toward the house. The gray men had come back! He was trapped!

Hume shrank back into the closet, stealthily shutting the door. He threw a pile of clothing into a dark corner and slithered beneath it. The warmth gradually veneered his terror. He heard no more footsteps. For the mo-

ment, he was safe. Slowly he gave way to the drowsiness he could no longer control.

*The boy and his father found a dry island of land in the swamp. Curling into the thicket, they slept four hours and awoke after dark. They moved ahead quietly. When they saw the battered farmhouse, the father left the child in a nearby ditch, where a film of ice was beginning to form on the stagnant water, and went to see if he could find any food in the house. He came back with an armload of canned goods; they ate well before they went on.*

Hume awoke violently, the wraith of the nightmare still clinging to his brain. It was the old dream of the beginning, of the catastrophe that had rung the knell of yesterday. And of Beth: of shrieking desolation and of a city turned in an instant into flaming dust.

Yet the sleep had done him good. The worst of his fatigue was gone; his head was clear again. Judiciously he picked over the clothing in the closet, dressing himself as warmly as he could. He found a pair of discarded riding boots, cracked and in need of soling, but nonetheless better than the shoes he had on.

He descended the stairway and went back to the kitchen, intending to fill the pockets of the coat with canned goods. Oddly, the cupboard was empty. He was sure he had left several cans unopened, and without food he was afraid to try the desert crossing. Then he found the carving knife in a kitchen drawer. He rationalized comfort and security from it. There would be animals of some sort on the desert. If necessary, he could kill one to ease his hunger, though the clinging crust of culture made even the idea faintly nauseating.

It was dawn when he set out. He plodded on for hours, without stopping and without taking his eyes from the mountains. The sun rose high, but Hume felt neither the heat nor his own weariness, for he walked in freedom, unafraid. There were no gray men here; there would be none. This desert was an unwanted waste, claimed only by the sun and wind, inhabited only by the small, frightened animals that fled as Hume approached.

The ground was a rolling carpet of colored stones, worn smooth by the patient erosion of time. Here and there were scattered clumps of hardy brush and an occasional brilliantly flowered plant clinging close to the earth. Frequent hills of stone three or four feet high cast narrow shadows on the desert. From the semi-darkness terrified animal eyes peered out at Hume, like glowing, yellow gems.

Hume's stride gradually lengthened with his returning self-confidence. He squared his shoulders. Since yesterday he had not spoken, fearing that even the sound of his voice would betray him. Now he talked aloud to the emptiness, for the pure joy of hearing his own voice. He shouted into the wind; he roared defiance at the invaders.

As he walked along, he picked up stones and hurled them at the hiding animals. His blood pounded with a strange excitement when they ran from him; and leaped with joy when he hit a toad and killed it.

Year ago, in college, Hume had been a baseball star. He needed only a little practice to restore the accuracy of his pitching technique. By midday he was able to hit any animal he saw on the desert.

It became a game with him to slaughter them, a pleasure that restored his sense of superiority, of dominion over all things of the earth. He was its master, not the hordes of gray men. He felt the familiar security of yesterday, the comfortable luxury of planetary ownership.

He killed rabbits by the score, neither for sustenance nor for safety, but to feed the flame of his possessiveness, so long stifled by his fear of the gray men. When he had perfected the technique of throwing the stones, he multiplied the pleasure by transforming it into an art. First he would frighten the animal, make it run; then, when it had nearly escaped his range, he would hurl the rock, watching with a savage delight while the victim leaped into the air, screaming in agony as it died.

Only once did the pattern change. He cornered a rabbit and, unable to flee, the terrified animal attacked him, slapping him viciously with its feet before he cut its throat with his kitchen knife. As the warm blood washed over his hand, he thought he might make a meal of the rabbit, but his hunger was not sufficiently acute for him to eat the uncooked flesh. He regretted that he had not brought any matches with him. But it was a minor annoyance. The mountains were very close; in another ten or twelve hours he would be on the other side, among his own people. He threw the carcass aside and went on.

In the afternoon he abandoned the coat he had taken from the farm and, shortly after, two of the sweaters. He knew he would want them again after dark, but the heat of the afternoon sun was unbearable and he was sure he could make better time if he were not impeded by the heavy clothing.

At sunset he reached the foothills. Red in the setting sun, the mountains towered above him, a snow-capped wall. His nerves tingled with triumph. He had nearly reached his goal. The pass was a half mile farther south. He could see the highway curving gracefully toward it.

He would have to move more cautiously again, now that he was once

more close to the road. But it would be for the last time. The gray men had not passed the mountains; he was confident of that; and he would be safe on the other side. It even seemed unlikely, when he considered the matter, that the gray men would be at the pass with any kind of force. They would still be consolidating the enormous territory they had taken close to the city. Probably they would have an outpost here, but he would be able to bypass that easily enough.

Hume came to the top of a hill higher than the rest and looked down upon the highway. In that instant his mounting confidence collapsed. For he saw a long, black, motorized column approaching from the valley, and at the foot of the pass a city-size camp of the gray men.

Terrified again, he crept down the face of the hill to a small gully, where he hid himself in a thicket of shrubs. Like the desert animals, he felt safe in the cold shadows. For an instant the analogy was clear to him. To the gray men he was of no greater value than the rabbits Hume had slain for the pure delight of expressing his own proprietary superiority. But the comparison was a disastrous hypothesis. It led his mind to the madness of despair. His conscious rationality reared back, rejecting the data, wiping his mind clear of the inevitable conclusion.

Slowly the motorized column clanged past Hume's hiding place; and slowly Hume reasoned away his fear. The pass was not the only way through the mountains. A man on foot could force a passage almost anywhere. Hume was vaguely familiar with the terrain, since he had occasionally vacationed at the mountain resorts. He convinced himself that, even if the gray men had occupied the pass itself, they would not have strayed from the highway because they were helpless without their motorized caravans of weapons.

At nightfall the batteries of searchlights encircling the invader's camp were turned on; as darkness deepened, the camp blazed like a fallen star. Hume saw a small vehicle move out from the camp, stopping at intervals along the road. When it passed beneath his gully, he understood why, for one of the gray men got out and began to pace the cement. The enemy was putting out a network of sentries along the base of the mountains. Obviously, then, other refugees had slipped into the safety of the hills at night, and the gray men intended to stop them.

Momentarily Hume was breathless with panic. He was cornered and he had no way of escape. Before this his safety had been bought by hiding from the gray men and running when he could. Now he must either wait quietly for them to find him, or fight his way free. Once again the analogy of the rabbit played dangerously on the fringe of his mind. Even the

rabbit Hume had cornered could not meekly resign itself to death; it was driven instinctively to fight its way out.

Hume had no alternative. As the moon rose, he crept out of his gully noiselessly. When he stood up, his feet felt like dead clods; his teeth chattered and his body shook in the icy wind sweeping out of the mountains. His hands searched the level of the earth until he found a suitable stone of the right weight. When the sentry was directly below him, he hurled the rock with all his strength. The gray man dropped and lay still, a huddled shadow on the white road.

Exultant, Hume slid down the hill and stood over his enemy—a thin, frail, underfed creature, as powerless as Hume himself when he was taken by surprise and stripped of the power of his weapons. Shivering, Hume ripped off the long, swirling, high-collared, gray coat which the sentry was wearing. It was woven of a material much like wool; Hume felt warmer as soon as he drew it on.

The gray man began to twist and groan. Sneering, Hume watched the agony for a moment. Then he picked up the stone again and hammered it into the colorless, gray face. The bones crunched and he felt the warm blood spurting over his hands. An ecstatic madness, a purity of joy he had never experienced before, seized him, and he beat the quivering pulp until he was breathless.

When he paused, he heard footsteps on the road behind him. Another sentry, perhaps—coming to relieve his friend! Hume turned and fled toward the mountains, running frantically up the steep inclines, stumbling through the ragged gulches. He was pursued by a fear that rode him until his pulse banged in his temples, his breath came in gasps, and a taste of blood tainted the back of his throat. He paused and looked back.

A tall figure was bending over the gray man Hume had killed.

Hume turned to run again, but his head swam with exhaustion. His knees began to buckle. He saw the narrow ravine ahead, but he hadn't the strength to resist his own momentum. He slid helplessly down the rocky bank and lay still, bent unnaturally over a heap of boulders.

*Cautiously rounding a bend, the boy and his father saw two gray men fighting in the middle of the highway. They sprang into the roadside ditch, the man shielding his son's body with his own. Gradually, the father understood that they had not been seen. He crept out and examined the body on the road. The assailant had fled, taking his victim's coat, but leaving the gun. The father picked it up and called his son. They turned off the highway and began the steep climb toward the peaks.*

The wound in Hume's cheek was bleeding again, and one foot was grotesquely bent beneath him. Slowly he pulled himself to his feet, dizzy with pain.

He saw the crest of the hills above him and he began to climb, moving uncertainly, pulling himself forward with his clawing hands. Hour by hour he inched upward, pausing at intervals for rest, shivering with cold, wracked by pain, leaving a thin trail of freezing blood on the rocks below him.

His rational consciousness narrowed to a single awareness. He must pass the ridge; he would be safe, then. The pain, the tearing hunger, the agonizing memories were the torments of another body, somehow remotely related to his own. He set his eyes on the crest and moved toward it.

At dawn he was above the snow line. The ridge was only a few feet farther on. He looked up at the crevices of snow, long crystal folds streaked with golden light. The wind screamed and a mist of snow bit into his face, but he did not notice it. He was safe! He had reached the top!

An energy and warmth from outside himself gradually flowed into Hume's body, a joy that lifted him up in spite of his pain. He stood erect and felt nothing. Proudly, the joy of achievement singing in his soul, he began to walk toward the crest. . . .

. . . Obediently, the boy waited in the cave where his father had left him while he went to find the shortest way down to the river on the other side. The father had given his son the gray man's gun, showing him how to use it. "But don't fire unless it's absolutely necessary. Even if the gray men reach the top of the pass, they probably won't find your hiding place. Use the gun only if you see one of them coming toward you."

The boy looked out. He saw the tall, gray figure climbing up the hill of the snow at the mouth of the cave. Calmly he aimed the gun, as his father had instructed him, and fired. The man fell, rolled a short distance through the brittle snow, and lay still.

For a long time the boy crouched in the cave, but as the hours passed, hunger eventually drove him out. He slid down the snow past the body of the man he had killed, ignoring it. Among the pines he found traces of his father's footprints and followed them down out of the snow to the bank of the river. He sat by the muddy water, staring across at the opposite bank. His people were over there; his father had said so; but where? Why had no one come out to meet him, bringing a little boat that would ferry him across the river?

Hopefully, the boy followed the bank, wondering if there might be a bridge farther on. Just beyond a thicket of brambles he found his father, sprawled in the damp earth, his body crushed in the tracks made by a treaded vehicle.

The boy then heard a sound on the other side of the river and, looking up, he saw a black, motorized column moving triumphantly on the opposite bank.

The boy turned to run, and discovered that he had been quietly surrounded by a corps of gray men, who were pointing their short, vicious weapons at him. When they saw that the boy was powerless, they threw a net over him and bound him securely with it. Later they carried him back to their camp and put him in a square, black box, heavily barred on one side, so that they could study his habits at their leisure. In a sense, some of them were even kind toward the boy, treating him the way he had his own pet terrier when he still lived back in the city.

### *The Thrill of "Something Different"*

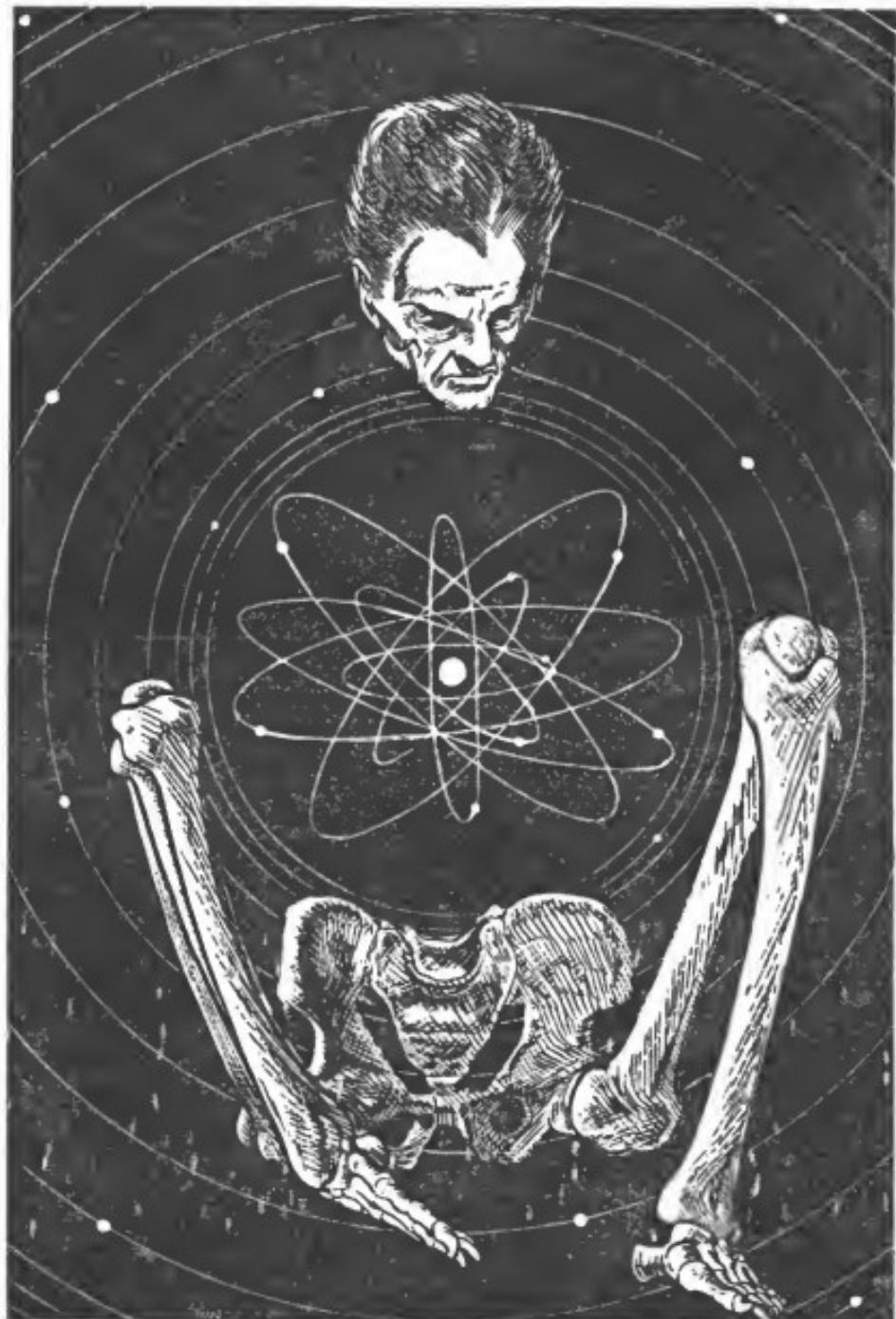
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*The space between scientific near-omniscience and insanity is a tightrope which cannot be walked successfully by some. Matthew Laberro wasn't really insane, although many believed him to be. He was merely acutely sensitive to man's growing worship of the false god, Power. Science was all; the study of the cultural arts was a practice which aroused suspicion. Laberro rebelled against a world where efficiency and mechanical skill made physical work an outmoded custom for humans. . . .*

*Max Larkin may have felt a vague sense of discontent over the same things which disturbed Laberro. But Max was a Manager, and because he knew what was good for the world he knew what was good for himself!*

illustrator: John Giunta

## *Breaking Point*

by JOHN CHRISTOPHER

THE FACE of the reporter on the call-screen was very young and fresh and feminine. She said brightly:

"And hobbies, Manager Larkin?"

Max said: "Drinking wine, minding my own business, and journalism." The face darkened in bewilderment.

"And . . . what?"

"Journalism," Max said decisively. He spelled it for her. "Look it up in the Microfilmopedia."

He flicked the channel closed, and paused to consider the shortcomings of the newer generation. As a reference reporter for Television Services the girl presumably must have a fairly good degree in Revised Humanities, with history as a compulsory subject. He thought of the twentieth century tearing down its heritage of forests to create the ocean of newsprint in which it wallowed; all that turmoil of activity no longer recorded even as a footnote in the minds of men. Books, although not read, were still known as a classification, if only for their existence as repositories of knowledge and information too arcane or trivial to have been microfilmed. But the journals had disappeared. Three years before, Transport and Communications had closed down, because of lack of demand, the news magazine provided for tourists on the world's last rail system that shuffled up and down the Italian peninsula. Only one journal now remained. *Research*, printed in Hong Kong on a hand press and circulated, through-

out the teeming planet, to some seven hundred and fifty people as eccentric as Max himself.

He picked up the most recent copy, delighting again in the antique, formal beauty of the printed page. It was exhilarating to read it; to be aware of thought laid down in leisurely patterns of communication instead of incoherently flung out to an audience from the chaotic telescreens. An essay on the Minor Grebe Mutation. A further installment in Yan-Tsun's painstaking analysis of the German Thirty Years' War. And an article, by his old friend, Matthew Laberro, on the early days of *Atomics*, the first great international managerial body. He realized the telescreen in the wall was still flickering and bawling away, and he switched it off, put in his reading lenses and settled down.

"The actual organization of ATOMICS, out of the worldwide breakdown of the Last War, was in itself a justification of Pareto's neglected observations on the craft of government. During the interregnum between the Second German War and the Last War the actual atomic scientists had been among the most volatile and articulate of those pacifist and near-pacifist groups utilized by the Kremlin in its political juggling. It would have seemed reasonable to expect that, should any phoenix atomic power organization rise from the ashes of war, these same scientists would provide its leaders. But the time for talking was over now; all depended on swift and resolute action. Throughout the world shattered and disillusioned social groups surveyed the remaining atomic power centers with a hesitancy that was nicely balanced between worship and savage hostility; and the balance could not hold for long. To an outside observer, indeed, the hostility and resulting barbarism would have seemed inevitable, but in fact this civilization was only then entering its universal empire stage. The desire for order and stability was very strong, and produced its own response. ATOMICS began to climb into strength and power; but by the efforts not of its scientists but its managers. The men with only pass degrees, but with that insight into the human condition that so often goes with mediocre academic qualifications, automatically came to the front. Where their intellectual superiors had theorized, they acted.

"The movement was a worldwide one, and threw up a world leader. Otto van Mark, before the war an obscure security officer at the Philadelphia plant, set himself the gigantic task of fitting the jigsaw pieces of resurgent atomic energy groups into a planetary cartel that would ignore the feeble national governments in whose territories it existed. Within two years and at some cost in human life—Van Mark was not a scrupulous

man or he would never have attempted his task—he had succeeded. ATOMICS, the first worldwide managerial group, was an accomplished fact.

"There is no possible doubt that Van Mark regarded this purely as a first step on the inevitable path to that world ownership which had tantalized despots for four or five thousand years. First he fashioned a defense for ATOMICS; later he would attack. The defense was simple and effective. He had built a special plant, segmented by automatically removable shields. In the segments he planted fissionable material just below the critical mass. The effect of the removal of the shields was calculated as sufficient to blow the North American continent off the map, and render the rest of the globe quite uninhabitable. The master-controlling switch was at Van Mark's disposal. The world's fate was in his hands.

"It was a weapon of defense, but it is quite clear from the papers he left that Van Mark intended to use it for attack also. He would bluff the tottering regional governments into handing power over to him on the threat of otherwise blowing the planet more than sky-high. Only it was no bluff. Van Mark was the true megalomaniac. There was only one thing he had failed to account for—bad luck. He fell downstairs on a fine June morning, and died of a broken spine.

"His successor, Leverson, lacked Van Mark's ambition. Something of a political theorist, he recognized the inevitability of power passing into the hands of the other nascent managerials. He was content that this should be so, and that power should, for the good of mankind, sway perilously between them. For a while he maintained Van Mark's special project. But in 1994, with United Chemicals, Lignin Products and Agriculture Inc. firmly planted as managerials, he decided that the risk was thenceforth greater than the advantages and the fissionable materials were dispersed and the project closed down, without any but a handful of the Chief Director's helpers having known of its existence. The world empire was safe."

Laying the journal down, Max wondered idly where Matthew had picked up the story from. History, of course, was no longer regarded as a profitable field of study, but he himself had played about quite a bit among the foundations of the managerial world, and this information was new to him. He remembered, though, that Matthew was Manager Laberro of Atomics, Pennsylvania Section. Probably he had gained access to some private company records. But such an interest was in itself puzzling. Max would not have thought that in the entire circle of subscribers and contributors to *Research*, which was far from being conspicuous for modern-

ism, there was any so dogmatically uninterested in managerialism as Matthew. This scholarly anecdote of the new world's creation did not chime with Matthew's scathing and frequently expressed contempt for it.

From his untidy Sheraton bureau he rooted out the most recent of Matthew's letters. He was studying the crabbed handwriting when the call-screen began to buzz on its mobile stand. He pressed the button on his chair-arm and it glided noiselessly towards him. When he flicked the switch over he saw Hewison's creased, fat face projected on the screen.

Director Hewison, of United Chemicals, said:

"Lo, Max. How are things down your way?"

"Cold," Max said briefly. "Thirty-eight Centigrade. It will probably snow before Christmas. That all?"

Hewison laughed. "It is snowing up here. Snowing a blizzard. There is something, though. You know the Code?"

Max nodded. The Code of Agreement was the flexible and seldom-invoked framework which provided a basis of working between the various managerials.

"Some of it."

"Section Eighty-one. The right to interrogate members of another managerial. Permission to be sought from the Director of the sector concerned in each individual case."

"Reciprocal police rights. I know."

"We don't like it," Hewison explained. "None of us like it. It's a damned nuisance altogether. So there's a clause of invocation—it's only to be used where a real danger to society exists."

Max said patiently: "All very interesting. And now?"

"Someone," Hewison said delicately, "has put the finger on you, Max. I just wanted to put you in the picture, but there's nothing to worry about. We've only given permission for interrogation. If there's any charge to be preferred there must be a U.C. official present and the charge must go through U.C. channels."

Max said drily: "Thanks. From what source am I to expect these unwelcome guests?"

"ATOMICS. There's absolutely nothing to worry about. We're watching everything."

"And the 'real-danger-to-society' part. Did they explain to you precisely what that was?"

Hewison shook his head. "They don't have to. And you know what ATOMICS are like for keeping their mouths shut."

"Would you like to know what it is? Come closer." Hewison's bald

head bobbed automatically towards the screen and then drew back foolishly. "I've been keeping a Venusian giraffe," Max told him. "Without a license."

He switched the screen off, and Hewison's dawningly annoyed face faded out. Max picked up Matthew's letter again. He reread the last sentence:

"By the way, I've been reading Swift again. An amazing man, Max. He knew men."

There was only one visitor. He wore the green police uniform with the gleaming ATOMICS flame as a badge in his lapel. He was young—not more than twenty-six or -seven—fair-haired, with a surface expression of diffidence that did not entirely conceal reserves of quiet assurance. When Max and he had settled down together in the lounge, he clicked on his pocket sound-mirror with casual openness.

He said: "I hope we won't have to trouble you too much, Manager Larkin."

Max said: "I don't use the title. Call me Larkin—or Max if you want to be friendly."

"My name's Menigstein," the ATOMICS man said. "Norman Menigstein. This business, now. I won't say it's a minor matter. It isn't. But it only concerns you in a minor way. We want information about someone and we think you may be able to supply it."

Max said: "Laberro?"

Menigstein said, quietly acute: "What have you heard?"

Max shook his head. "Nothing. I'm not even being clever. I've corresponded with Laberro for some years and I don't know anyone else in ATOMICS." He paused. "I'm surprised you haven't had all that checked."

Menigstein said ruefully: "We always get credited with more thoroughness than we have the means for. You should see the allocation we work on. If we had had the staff to compile the kind of dossiers people think we keep, I might not be on this job now. Yes, it's Laberro. What can you tell me?"

"As I said," Max told him, "we've corresponded for years. That is, we've written letters to each other—by hand, not wire recordings. I take it you will have laid your hands on some of those, so you know what we wrote about. We are both amateur historians and . . . students of affairs. Human affairs."

"Laberro's character," the ATOMICS man went on patiently, "what impression have you had?" His gaze drifted lightly but acquisitively round

the room. "We're after a psychological pattern, not specific information."

"A psychological pattern? Well, he's an idealist. And my definition of an idealist is a man who has a high opinion of himself and expects the rest of the world to toe the same line. And since people inevitably fall short of any conceivable target that you set for them, you might call him a disgruntled idealist." He looked at Menigstein directly. "This is an old friend of mine I'm talking about. You can see I treat your profession with every respect."

"As a matter of fact," Menigstein said quietly, "I know Matthew myself. I've known him for a few years. That's why they gave me the job. Don't imagine I like it, but it's important, all right."

"Yes." Max pressed the bell-push on the arm of his chair. "I suppose it is important when someone threatens to set off an atomic explosion that will destroy the planet."

Menigstein showed no open sign of surprise. His tall figure slumped back more idly into his chair.

He said: "You shouldn't try to confuse police officials, Max. You might as well tell me what you have heard."

"That time," Max said, "I *was* being clever." He picked up the copy of *Research* from the table and handed it to Menigstein open at Matthew's article. "Two and two make four. That's not a truth; it's a tautology."

Giuseppe came in with the drinks; squat, fragile beakers with the pale yellow tinted *Lacrimae Christi di Orvieto '61*. Menigstein was reading the article in *Research* with swift absorption. He picked the glass absently from its place by its elbow and raised it to his lips. He paused, his nostrils catching the bouquet and looked across at Max, smiling.

"I heard you kept a good cellar." He examined the glass in his hand. "We ought to toast something with this kind of stuff. What about—the future of the human race?"

Max raised his glass. "Strangely enough, that is one of the things I believe in. There is one point on which you can enlighten me. A major point. Can Matthew do it?"

Menigstein tapped the magazine and nodded. "It's all here, and it's no bluff. As you say, he is an . . . amateur historian. The original Van Mark headquarters were at Philadelphia; Matthew got a managership there. The old fuze building had been used for stores—anything. Nobody remembered what it was built for in the first place. Matthew had it cleared out and had the segments in the main chamber filled with U-287, just below the critical mass. He had had the screening apparatus checked beforehand; it only needs a button to be pressed now to shoot the works."

Max said: "I'm surprised he could do all that without rousing any suspicion."

Menigstein grinned wearily. "Yes, it chalks up a black mark against our internal administration, doesn't it? It's the old tag—they don't give a damn in ATOMICS. Nobody thought to ask why the stuff was being put there."

Max said: "And there's one other thing. Why haven't we already been atomized?"

"It's an interesting situation," Menigstein admitted. "It accounts for my being here. Shall we discuss it here, or . . . ?"

On the wall a Sèvres-inlaid clock announced nineteen hundred, with seven sweet, tinkling chimes.

"We can make it to Philadelphia on even time," Max said. "I don't normally use stratoliners, but there must always be an exception. You can tell me the details on the way there."

They dropped to the Philadelphia field at eighteen hundred forty-eight. A gyro picked them up and took them to the ATOMICS HQ on the city's edge; it sideslipped down through the winter dusk to the efflorescence of lights about the characteristically lopsided ATOMICS pylon. On the gyrostrip Max recognized a tall man with an intent, cold face as Silvestro, the ATOMICS Chief Director. He nodded dubiously to Max and turned to Menigstein:

"I hope you've got a good reason for bringing a non-ATOMICS man in."

Menigstein's attitude was calmly insubordinate. "No more than I gave you in my telecall from Naples. This is Manager Larkin. He's a friend of Laberro's, and he has some ideas that might be useful."

It was wonderful, Max reflected, what a sharpening effect the possibility of shortly being atomized had on youthful independence. Silvestro took it without rejoinder. He walked with them off the gyrostrip.

Menigstein said: "Any developments?"

The ATOMICS Chief Director shook his gaunt, graying head.

"He gave us a week. That was three days ago, of course. For some mad reason of his own he wants people to *know* they're going to be blown up. Whenever we send someone to argue with him he gets back to that. The end of the world is fixed and the world must know of its end."

"A week . . ." Max began.

Silvestro glanced at him. "Kovodrene. He's got himself pepped up with it. He could go a month without sleep at a pinch. We can't touch him that way."

"No way of trapping him? A servo-operated grapnel?"

Menigstein answered that. He said thoughtfully:

"You've read his article, Max. This was Van Mark's idea originally, and Van Mark was a methodical planner. There's a barrier of photocells round his desk. When it's on automatic anything crossing the barrier is enough to send things up. And it's always on automatic. We have to be careful in the way we approach him."

Max said: "I see." They had reached the lift. "I think I might as well go straight down to him."

Silvestro looked at him with a discouragingly jaundiced air.

"I don't suppose it can do any harm," he said.

The control room was a bare-looking place with a large desk in the middle and a chair behind it. Just inside the door, out of range of the photoelectric barrier, another chair had been placed. Max noted with relief that it was a roomy and comfortable one.

In the chair behind the desk, Matthew Laberro was sitting. Max looked at him keenly. Friends and correspondents for many years, they had never met or even communicated on the near-substitute of the telecall. For some reason he had thought of Matthew as tall; he was astonished to find him small, smaller than his own slight build, almost dwarfish. He had a thin, deeply lined face and deep-set eyes. The skin pouched up beneath them as he watched Max come into the room.

Max said: "I should introduce myself, Matthew. Max Larkin."

Laberro's mouth curved downwards into a smile.

"I've had quite a gaggle in here the last few days," he said. His voice was soft, suspiciously gentle. "Philosophers, priests, and straightforward gentlemen who frankly admit to having an interest in the planet's continuing existence. It was a bright idea of them to get you. I take it you are Max? The fall of Nineveh?"

"Six hundred and six."

"Yes, it is Max. I won't say I'm glad to meet you. In our acquaintance there was no need for physical proximity. Have you decided that we ought to meet before we . . . all . . . pass over? I'm intrigued, Max."

"No," Max said. "I never act from disinterested motives." He paused, looking at Laberro. "I'm disappointed. I thought one thing we agreed on was the folly of intervention."

"As far as intervention on a limited scale is concerned, I'm sure we do agree. But total intervention—I might say cosmic intervention—that's bound to be a different matter, isn't it?"

"It's larger, certainly," Max said. He settled comfortably into the chair. "How long have you been planning all this, Matthew?"

Laberro shrugged. "Three years. I stumbled on the old Van Mark records soon after I was transferred here. To be quite honest, my first intentions were no more than speculative. I wanted to see if it were possible for one man to get away with it—to set the fuze that could wipe out human life if it were lit." He smiled. "Once that was done there seemed little reason for not lighting it."

Max said patiently: "I follow the earlier motives. It's the kind of joke I would have some difficulty in not playing about with myself. But it's not the kind of joke a sane man carries to its conclusion."

Laberro said: "That doesn't touch me, Max. A strong instinct for self-preservation is a necessary condition for continuing life. Any ethical code must attribute insanity to someone doing as I shall do. Tell me something, Max. Is all life a pointless joke, or is there pattern and purpose to it? If it's a joke, can it matter if it ends? And if there's pattern, must not my action be part of that pattern?"

"An excluded middle," Max pointed out. "I'm surprised at you, Matthew. What of an evolving purpose?"

"Shavia's Life Force? The atheist's excuse for going on living. I'm surprised at you, Max."

"Intellectually you can't rule it out. And his name was Shaw, not Shavia. But I think I see your difficulty. I don't suppose it would help at all to tell you that your trouble is an ingrowing arrogance?"

Laberro said: "Everyone of us who contributed to *Research* knew that we were superior to the ordinary run of the modern world. But I for one didn't realize until quite recently how great the superiority was. I didn't realize it until I had this little fuze of mine all set and it occurred to me, going about my ordinary duties, how easily I could just draw a line under man's career and write a large, red *stop*. I started observing more closely. I looked in on the telescreens; a thing I had always avoided doing before. Look."

The ubiquitous telescreen occupied a large section of the wall on Laberro's left and Max's right. Laberro pressed one of the buttons on his desk and the screen blurred into action. A row of well-formed girls wearing silk tights and gold shoes performed a high-stepping jig in time to raucous and singularly tasteless music. The camera followed them intimately; very intimately.

"Philadelphia," Laberro said. "Now Hollywood."

The announcer said: "We bring you—Culture Hour. The great music

of the past. And first, in response to many requests, that masterpiece of two centuries ago: Saroyan's "Come On-a My House!"

The camera flitted about the orchestra, particularly in the luscious, sawing string section.

"London," Laberro announced.

Vague forms ran and slipped about in a sea of fog resting on a sea of mist. Around them there were glimpses of banked crowds, shouting massly. The commentator was barking hoarsely: "Recs-Williams has it, passes to Jones—no, is it Edwards?—no, Jones. A lovely pass. A beautiful pass. Oh, he's lost it. I think he's lost it. Yes, it's a scrum again. This is a magnificent game!"

"Delhi," said Laberro.

But instead he switched the screen off.

"That's a random selection," he told Max. "That's the second half of the twenty-second century. Go on, defend it. I'm waiting."

Max said mildly: "I wouldn't dream of defending it. But you. Do you feel so strongly about it that you are justified in wiping it all out?"

"Justification," Laberro said, "is only for the uncertain. I have no doubts. I can do it, and what I can do is its own justification."

"Children?" Max asked. "Animals?"

"You'll get no thalamic reactions from me. Sentiment is stupidity. Children become men. Animals die continually, in varying states of pain. A universal quietus is the same whether it comes at one instant of time or sporadically over a century."

"Yourself, then," Max said. "You are resigned to that, too?"

Laberro said slowly: "Every man that dies—every creature—takes an entire universe with it. But a subjective universe. I shall take an objective world, a billion billion universes with me. Can you believe that I am actively looking forward to the moment when I shall press this particular button?"

Laberro's finger hovered above the small green disk on his control panel.

"Yes," Max said. "I can believe it." He paused. "You want the world to know what is going to happen? Why—simple sadism?"

Laberro said gravely: "No. I want them to be warned. It's unfair, somehow, that they should not be warned."

Max nodded comprehendingly.

"The telescreen," he said. "It's on a telecall circuit as well?"

Laberro said: "Yes. Why?"

"Put us on a two-way to Silvestro's office, then."

Laberro looked at him oddly for a moment. He said at last:

"If you like."

They saw Silvestro's office. Silvestro himself was sitting down, with Menigstein standing beside him.

Silvestro said: "Well?"

"Formal report," Max said. "I confirm previous findings that Manager Laberro is quite determined to carry his project through. We may take it that the explosion will occur as planned. I suggest that emergency arrangements to evacuate as many as possible to Mars and Venus go into operation straight away. I suggest also that the world should be told what is going to happen."

Silvestro bowed his gaunt, gray head.

"Agreed." He looked directly at Laberro. "You confirm that we still have three days?"

"My intention," Laberro said, "doesn't change in any particular. You have three days."

"You won't settle for a world dictatorship?"

"I'm not a fool. The moment I leave this control board my power is gone. You'd better tell them."

The screen went blank, but Max still sat, facing Laberro, in the arm-chair.

Laberro said: "You might as well go now, Max. You'll have your own affairs to attend to."

Max said: "Attending to affairs presupposes a world continuing afterwards. If we've got three days I don't see any reason to spend them running about. I'm happy enough here."

"I wonder," Laberro said curiously. "Will they rush this place, do you think? Will their blind fury precipitate matters?" He hesitated. "Silvestro couldn't be bluffing me . . . ?"

Max said nothing, but his eyes traveled to the telescreen.

Laberro nodded. "Yes, that's the answer to that."

He switched on to Philadelphia. The announcer was speaking, against the blank, blue screen preserved for momentous occasions. He explained what had happened and what was going to happen in even, measured tones. There was a fair chance that Mars and Venus would escape with no more than climatic disturbances and as many as possible would be got away to those planets by a full space lift. Evacuees would have to be young, fit, intelligent—they would be chosen by District Managers.

". . . What do you think?" Laberro said. "They'll graft it to hell. And those left behind will storm the space-ports."

To guard against remote contingencies, a mixed party would be got off

in the new stellar-equipped vessel and would head for Centauri should the solar system become entirely uninhabitable. For the rest, there was nothing to do but wait. There were the churches. Essential services, of course, should be maintained to the last.

Laberro laughed. "That's a joke!"

Max said: "You aren't quite succeeding, are you? Some will survive on the other planets. Man the race remains. And even may go on to other solar systems."

Laberro said indifferently: "That doesn't matter. At least they will have to start from the beginning again to work like slaves to defeat a hostile environment. I wonder if they will be able to do it. You were on Venus. What do you think will happen there?"

"Without the home planet to draw on? I think the odds are about three to one on men dying out, or degenerating below the level of the natives."

"That's my own view," Laberro said. "If they can win out, good luck to them. But I don't think they will." He paused. "I suppose Silvestro hasn't got any idea that I might relent at the last moment? I shan't. If the telescreen still works I shall derive no small amusement from watching the ants scurry round on their ant-hill."

Max yawned. "Three days is a long time," he said. "I think I'll take a nap."

He was awakened from his nap by the voice of a telecommentator. Laberro was watching the screen. It showed the foyer at the New Haven space-port; a long line of young men and women patiently waiting their turn to pass through to the waiting ships. Occasionally the scene switched to show one of the ships departing; lifting on its springs of smoke and flame into the hopeful sky. The commentator spoke briefly and factually of what was taking place. The long lines shuffled forward. The camera flicked from them to take in the crowd of other men and women who stood calmly and silently watching the chosen ones in their slow trek towards the ships.

Laberro switched over to another station. This was a roving camera program also; apparently all stations had gone over to factual reporting at this time of crisis. This showed a religious service; the thousand-year-old music, the patient and even older ritual. The faces of people in the church were serious and preoccupied.

On the third station Laberro tried, they were covering the Waizman Museum. It was crowded now with people who moved slowly from one exhibit to the next, taking their farewells of antique beauties—vases from

Attica, Roman mosaics, fragile Japanese paintings. The camera focused on the Winged Victory of Samothrace, twice buried and twice dug up, the second time from the ruins of Paris. Its battered, gracious contours swam up to fill the screen.

Max closed his eyes again, and settled more deeply into his chair.

He allowed himself to doze, waking at intervals to see Laberro still gazing at the telescreen which went on reflecting facet after facet of the planet's preparation for its end. The mounting tempo of the evacuation . . . the churches overflowing with quiet and serious worshipers . . . people on essential services carrying on calmly with their usual tasks . . . a world paying unhurried reverence to the treasures of its own past . . . scores of scenes, but all impregnated with the same combination of resignation and inspired purpose. Laberro watched. Max, between catnaps, watched Laberro.

One scene, some eighteen hours after the announcement, was particularly impressive. In among the California giant redwoods the camera darted to follow a family: a man, a woman, a boy about seven and a girl about five. They strayed between the aisles of these giant trees, pygmies lost in a titanic forest. And yet strangely impressive pygmies. The little girl jumped on a jutting root of one of the trees and stood there. The gyro-sited camera leaped up for a high-angled view of her, far down, golden-headed, beside the ancient king of the forests. Laberro switched to another station quickly; too quickly.

Max, watching him, calculated the chances. Sitting there, he had nothing to think about but Laberro and the power poised under Laberro's hand. He could see now that his guess had been right—that his aim was possible of achievement. But in this realization he became aware of the way it could go wrong also. Laberro would not stand three days of this. But, rushed into an earlier mental crisis, might his pride drive him the other way, precipitating him into the irreversible action of depressing the small green button? Everything depended on the essential stability of Laberro's mind. It was not a cheerful thought with which to while away the waiting hours.

He saw the strain continuing to gather in Laberro's face; an indication of the conflict in the mind behind it. He watched, trying to anticipate the breaking point. It came, at an irrelevant moment. London, late on the second day, was letting its camera drift through some of its ancient byways. It stopped in a statuary's yard. A man was carving, chipping pieces of wood away with careful, fractionally gauged strokes. It was a job which must require weeks or months for completion.

Laberro rose to his feet. His right hand hovered, hesitating, above the green button. Then, with a cry, he pulled back the main power switch and stumbled forward into Max's waiting arms.

In his office Silvestro said: "Good work, Larkin."

Laberro was muttering brokenly: "You must tell them. You must tell them straight away. They must know at once. Those wonderful people . . . They must know."

Max would have broken it by degrees, Silvestro said:

"Get hold of yourself, Laberro. There's nothing to tell."

"That everything's all right!" Laberro said. "You must tell them that."

Silvestro said to Menigstein: "Put Philadelphia on."

It might have been the same vaudeville show. The female legs and breasts pranced across the stage to the same cacophony. Laberro shook his head, dazed.

"I don't understand."

"Larkin's idea," Silvestro said smugly.

Max said quietly: "They never were told, Matthew. They never would have been told."

Laberro said: "But the telecasts . . . ! The churches—the museums—the girl in the forest . . . I don't understand."

His eyes went from one to the other of them, like a worried dog's.

"It was all staged," Max explained patiently. "You were so sure we could not reach you at your desk. And we couldn't, of course. But the tele-screen was outside your barrier. That could be tampered with. Your controls took you onto a half dozen fake stations Telecommunications rigged up specially for us. All the scenes were acted, Matthew."

Silvestro said: "Tele did a damned fine job. It'll be a long time before I bitch at Saguki again."

Laberro said bewilderedly: "But why?"

"I'm afraid," Max said, "essentially because we could not trust the human race to take its end with the dignity Saguki's actors were able to muster. *Ars meliora vita*. And it was essential to make that point to you."

"In other words, to lie," Laberro said dully.

"Is a poem a lie?" Max asked. "We gave you a new point of view. Your earlier one was a trifle biased, you know. And man does have some good points, even managerial man. He isn't vindictive, for instance. We've arranged about your future, Matthew. You're being transferred to another job. A menial one, but I think you might find some attractions in it. You're to join the research station Lignin runs—in the California redwood forest. Your future there is your own."

He went out with Silvestro, still incredulous but looking as though he might be on the verge of waking from a bad dream. Menigstein and Max watched them go.

Menigstein said: "Another good mark for Manager Larkin!"

Max pulled a face. "And for Official Menigstein."

Menigstein grinned. "I'm demoted. Back on personnel research. Set two years' promotion."

Max said: "Go on."

"I checked the Director. Insolence of manner. Remember?"

Max looked at him a moment. "Managerial man," he said, "is not vindictive. Does it bother you, Norman?"

"It's my personal triumph," Menigstein said. "I'm leaving. I'm shaking the dust of ATOMICS from off my shoes."

Max looked at him enquiringly.

"I'm going with Laberro," Menigstein said, "to watch the redwoods growing in California. It's a job for life."

They sat on the edge of Silvestro's ornate desk, their arms about each other's shoulders, and laughed together until the tears flowed.



illustrator: Norman Nodel



*She was as fragile as a snowflake. Around her there was the heady, un-spoiled spirit of Nature, and when Nick saw her he forgot about the petty troubles at the garage, forgot about the bustle and noise of the city, ignored the stinks and ugly sights of a giant metropolis—and found his way to the sorrow and heartbreak of an impossible love!*

## *As Holy and Enchanted*

by HENDERSON STARKE

FOR HIM spring mornings had a character all their own, an indefinable essence that the mornings of the other seasons never had. And the best spring morning of all was a Sunday spring morning—when he did not go to the shop, when he awoke in time to hear the sleepy chirping of the English sparrows in the false dawn, when he loved to lie in bed, sleepy-warm, and smell the sweet, new air and dream lazy dreams.

Then when, beyond the skyline of dingy buildings, the heavens began to color rose, he would get out of bed and yawn and expect, secretly, that today something very fine and wonderful was going to happen to him.

Those mornings, he would put on his only suit, somewhat shiny from use, his favorite blue tie, a clear-sky blue, clean his shoes and, whistling, hurry out to meet the sun so that he would not lose another minute of the wonderful new day.

He always went first to the park. The park, before all the people came, was very quiet and peaceful. There was soft, lacy dew on the grass. And always, as he felt the trees around him, he imagined that he was far away from the city and in the midst of some delicate virginity, pure and sweet. The noises of civilization faded. The squirrels came out and chattered in the treetops. Occasionally he would hear the soft plunk of an acorn dropped from above. The birds' songs were clear. And the little, burbling fountain was surrounded by cooing pigeons who sidled away, unafraid, to let him pass.

One particular Sunday morning, the fairest yet of all the year, when he came to the edge of his park, he was aware, more intensely than ever before, that this was the day for the strange, wonderful thing to happen to him. As he walked along, the knowledge became unbearably sweet

within him, and it made the inside of his nose tickle with emotion.

The sun was fronted by the skyline, for it was newly risen. The air was fresh as only the air of spring can be. It was filled with the scents of new-born flowers and the long ago.

He stepped from the gravel path upon which he had been walking and onto the springy grass; his mind was alive with the delicious sensation of secrecy. He imagined that this, his short-cut to the burbling fountain, was mysteriously concealed from others and belonged to him alone among mortals.

He did not walk either too slow or too swift; slow enough to be conscious of all the sounds around him and all the little, life movements; swift enough to satisfy his urge to hurry on and meet the wonderful thing that would be sure to be waiting for him among the pigeons.

All at once, rudely shattering his thoughts, he heard an unusual, frantic fluttering from a treetop to his left. He turned his head in time to see a brown sparrow falling toward the earth, desperately trying to break its fall.

At the first instantaneous image, he felt sorry for it; scarcely with thought, he walked to where it lay on the grass, hoping there might be some way he could help it.

The sparrow was panting and, seeing the man-form, it fluttered its wings in fear.

He bent quickly to pick it up; it cheep-cheeped shrilly. He was very careful not to hurt it. He could feel its tiny heart beating against the palm of his hand. Gently as he could, he felt of its wings and its legs to see if they were broken and was relieved to find that they were not.

"Hello."

The girl's voice was very sweet and very startling. Sweet because of some melodious quality, like that of a native ballad singer; startling because he had thought himself alone.

In quick surprise, he opened his hand; the sparrow fluttered and then flew. He stared at his hand, at the disappearing bird, and then turned to the speaker.

"You did fix him," the girl said. "I was sure you were going to, and that's why I spoke."

He felt a shuddery current, something like fear, although strangely pleasant, creep up his spine. She was a beautiful girl, lithe and slender, and straight as a Georgia pine. Her hair was sunrise gold; her eyes, the brown of hazel nuts; and her teeth, uncovered by lips dewy with youth, flashed white in a quick, easy smile that reminded him of polar snow.

"I'm Mona," she said, holding out her slim, white hand to him.

Slowly he reached out to meet the hand. It felt warm and firm in his. He continued to stare blankly into her face, and then, realizing that he was being very impolite, he felt his face begin to redden.

"Hello," he said, for want of anything better to say.

She withdrew her hand; he felt the absence of it sharply.

"What's your name?" she asked. Her voice was like no voice he had ever heard; it was open and vibrant and warm and friendly and thrilling. It had just the trace of an accent.

"I'm—I'm Nick"

"Nick," she said, "Nick," drawing out the word as if she were taking it apart with her voice and finding all the hidden layers of meaning in it. "I like that name." Then, seeing that he was still watching her, she smiled with pleasure and pirouetted skillfully on the grass, making her snow-white skirt billow out with the movement, holding her arms wide apart. She ended up facing him again. "It *is* a beautiful dress, isn't it?"

He said, "Yes; it's a beautiful dress."

She laughed, and her laughter was like little bells, or like the silvery tinkle of a fast-flowing mountain brook. "I'm glad," she said. "I thought it would be what you liked." She tossed her head, making her hair flash out around it in a momentary, magic halo.

"You're—beautiful, too," he said. Immediately, he was chilled by the thought that she might turn and run away like a frightened faun.

"Do you really think so?"

"You're more beautiful than anything I've ever seen," he said. ". . . I shouldn't have said that. It just—sort of came out."

"I'm glad it did." She laughed again, and then she was beside him, her hand lightly resting upon his arm. He could smell the flower-fresh nearness of her; his throat swelled when she looked up into his face.

"I hoped you'd like me," she said.

He felt lost in her eyes, her beautiful, brown eyes. He said nothing, for there was nothing to say, and a numbness was in his mind.

"Are you working today?" she asked.

Behind the numbness, there were puzzles, but looking down at her, he was sure they were not essential, and he wished they would go away; the important thing was just to answer her and hear her voice again.

"No, Mona," he said.

She wrinkled her brow prettily. "Oh; I thought you were working . . . When I saw you here, I thought you were, and that's why I knew to speak to you, but I'm glad you're not. . . . I have a whole week to myself, and it's wonderful, isn't it?"

He said, "I think it's very wonderful."

"Where were you going, just now?" she asked, widening her eyes in innocent questioning.

"Me?" he said, and then he was embarrassed for saying it, because of course she meant him. "Oh, o-h. Just walking. Over to the fountain. The pigeons all come down to drink, early in the morning, before the people come . . ." Her smile was warm. "You know the fountain with the pigeons around it?" he finished, having lost the thread of thought in her smile.

"No," she said. "I don't belong here." And then she said, as if it explained everything, "I belong in Nebraska and Australia. I just came here for a week before I have to go on down to Australia."

"Oh," he said.

"Which way is the fountain? I'd love to see it; it must be quite pretty if you like it."

"It's—it's just a fountain. . . . I'll—I'll show it to you, if you want me to."

"Of course I do."

And the two of them, her hand lightly on his arm, began to walk through the park.

"You're the first one I've met down here," she said. "I was so in hopes I'd meet some of us; it's lonely with no one to talk to."

"Yes," he said, "I know. I'm often lonely."

Her eyes turned serious-sympathetic. "I'm sorry," she said, and her voice was full of understanding in a way he had never imagined possible. "I'm very sorry, Nick . . ." And then, with a little shout of joy, "Oh! That must be your wonderful fountain!"

"Yes," he said. Only now it did not seem so wonderful. He wanted to show her all the things more wonderful. He thought of the sunrise on tall mountains, and the flat, level blue of the ocean off Hawaii, and the burning of pine logs in a New England fireplace when the snow lay piled outside and the air was sharp, and the high, tumbling waterfalls in Africa that broke into rainbow spray, and all the other marvelous things he had read about during all his life.

She ran from him, scattering the startled pigeons, who fluttered a few feet and immediately resumed their endless search for food, to sit down on the old stone rim of the fountain. She dipped her hand lightly in the water; she drew it along with a free, graceful movement that was like a caress. "It feels so nice," she said. "I like water very much. Clear water. Like rain." She stared dreamily into it. "I work with water every day—almost—and yet: It's always so beautiful."

He had not moved. "You're beautiful," he said again in child-like wonder, knowing that to say it would not make her run away.

"Silly! You weren't listening to what I said!" She flipped some of the water from her hand, playfully. Then, when she saw it hit on his suit, she sprang up. . . .

"Oh! I'm sorry, Nicky. I didn't mean to get your suit all wet." She stood before him, looking up at him. "And such a pretty suit. You won't be mad at me, will you? because then you'd go away and I wouldn't have anyone to talk to."

He felt the lump in his throat; it had been there for a long time. "Mona," he said, "I don't think I'd ever want to go away."

"You say the nicest things." She took his hand and drew him, with gentle pressure, to the stones of the fountain. The pigeons, cooing softly, opened a little isle for them that closed as soon as they had passed.

"Sit down, Nicky," she said.

For a moment she sat there beside him, silent, staring into the unquiet water, seeing the flicker and gleam of darting goldfish outlined sharply against the green of the gently waving moss. The falling water sprayed and dimpled the surface, making the fish seem fluidly unreal.

He watched the mirrored mood on her face.

"I think you have one of the best jobs," she said.

Instinctively, he looked away from her and stared into the burbling fountain, too. Thinking of his job made him briefly miserable. His face grew hot. Then he was afraid she would see that he was ashamed. That made it all the worse. He hoped she was still staring into the water.

Looking back at her, he saw that she seemed dainty, fragile, somehow like a snowflake or a delicate crystal or something that would shatter with the first rumble of horizon thunder. He knew he must never say anything she did not want him to say—or she might go away, and he would never see her again.

"It's all right," he said.

"I think it's the most wonderful job," she insisted gently.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I suppose it really is."

Suddenly she asked, "Did you notice the sunrise this morning?"

"Yes," he said.

"It was a beautiful sunrise. Robert does them for Nebraska—do you know him?—and he's very good—but I don't know: this one, this morning: I think they must use more colors, down here."

He felt his throat constrict. He felt cold inside. He said, "I think they must," and waited.

"Yes, I guess they do," she said, smiling up at him. "Oh! I'm so glad I met you!" She held out both of her hands, and he took them in his.

"Hazel eyes," he said, "beautiful hazel eyes."

"Nicky," she said, "could you get off? I have the whole week here."

"I—I—."

"And you could show me the city—if you wanted to—that would be fun—don't you think so?—do you often go into the city at all?—and take me dancing, and—it would be just wonderful if you could."

She sprang away from him and danced around him, laughing, humming a little, sad-funny tune that he had never heard. "I'm a very good dancer." And she spun in a series of intricate steps, executed with happy grace.

When she ceased, her cheeks were rosy from her efforts, and her breath came quickly. "Come." She held out her hand. "Let's walk, and you can talk to me, and I can talk to you, and neither of us will be lonely."

He stood, and she came to him. "Lead me," she said. "Show me your wonderful park."

They began to walk; and, as they walked, she chattered happily, occasionally looking up at him for approval, talking of the trees and the birds and the wind and the grass and the change of the seasons. She talked in youth and enthusiasm. Once she paused to laugh at a gray squirrel, and it looked down at her quizzically, over the acorn it was holding in its forepaws.

He listened and half listened and sometimes only heard the sweet melody of her voice, rising and falling, reminding him of the pleasant wind in the scented trees and the quiet sea.

Time moved, or stood still, or was not; it did not matter.

Then, in their aimless walk, they came to the edge of the park and looked out on the city.

"Oh! How very big and pretty. And exciting! Do you often go out there, Nicky?"

"Quite often," he said, wanting to go back into the park, afraid that the city would break and shatter her with its many muted rumbles.

"It must be fun—to be where you're able to. You'll show it to me, won't you? You promised, remember? And tell me about it? About the buildings? And the streets?"

"Yes," he said, taking her hand; she squeezed in soft, answering pressure. "If you really want to see it."

Like two little children, hand in hand, they walked out into the city.

Their feet made the sharp clatter of the city; the Sunday traffic made the subdued roar of the city; the people's voices made the dry-sadness of the city.

Her questions came quickly, tumbling over themselves in flying curiosity, jumping with the speed of thought from subject to subject. He answered them all, softly, quietly, as if talking to a little girl who was first seeing the city and trying to know it all in a single hour. It gave him a sweet sense of belonging, and her eager wonder at his knowledge filled him with a pride and a joy he had never known.

"Here," he said, pointing to a new-shiny building, with doors gleaming with brass and windows sparkling with sunshine. "This. It's built on the very spot where an ancient, Spanish monastery once stood."

"You know so very much. About the strangest things—about these people."

"I come here often," he said.

"... We've been walking for a long time," she said.

"Are you tired?"

"Not very."

"Neither am I," he said.

"No; you only get tired when you're lonely; and we're not . . ." Her voice trailed away. "Look, Nicky! A tree. . . . It seems funny to see a tree here, among all these buildings: like it was growing out of the pavement instead of the ground."

"Yes; it does seem like that," he said.

"I wonder if it's a happy tree; do you think so, Nicky?"

"I guess it is. . . .

"Look: Mona?" he said.

"Yes?"

"I. . . . Look: Are you hungry?"

"... Are you?"

"Yes," he said, "Let's go eat."

"All right." She laughed lightly. "That sounds like fun."

When, shortly, they arrived at the door of a restaurant, he said, "Go on in."

"It'll be all right?" she asked doubtfully.

"Of course."

He guided her to a table and, when they ordered, she followed his lead, saying what he said, watching the waitress cautiously, out of the corner of her eye.

"I don't know how you do it," she said, looking up after the girl

had left their table. "I'd be afraid to death, if you weren't with me."

"You get used to it," he said.

"Of course you do. . . . Nicky? I'd love to live here—where I could come into the city—do all these wonderful things—whenever I wanted to."

"Would you really like to live here?" he asked, and his voice sounded dry and strained.

"Oh, very much, Nicky. I'd love to live here—almost better than anything." And having said that, she was suddenly very shy; she looked down at the snowy tablecloth and ran her fingertips over it.

He was not sure what to say; the palms of his hands were moist. And he was glad when the lunch arrived.

After the waitress left, they looked up and stared into each other's eyes.

"Well," he said, looking down at the food, "it looks all right to me."

"Yes," she said, "it's just fine."

There was a motionless silence.

"Well," he said. He picked up his water-glass and sipped, watching her. She picked up her glass and sipped, watching him.

He put the glass down and speared into the salad with his fork.

She imitated him. She chewed the salad carefully. She said, hesitatingly, "It's very good, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said, "it sure is."

"Ummmm," she said.

He broke off a piece of french bread, buttered it.

She broke off a piece of french bread, buttered it.

"Look—?" he said.

"Yes?"

"—Nothing."

She took more salad. "Does it snow often, here?"

"Snow?" He put down his knife across the edge of his plate.

". . . Hasn't for years. Last time was thirty-three, I think."

"Oh, yes," she said. "I remember, now."

When the lights in the theater went off, she stiffened. And, with the first trumpet jar of the newsreel music, she said, "Ohhhh," very softly. After that, for a few minutes, she was on the edge of her seat, watching wide-eyed. Once she said, "Oh, Nicky, look!"

But soon she settled down and rested her head on his shoulder. He slipped his arm around her. It seemed natural that he should. She moved closer to him; her hand found his. She made a little noise, deep in her throat, like a purr. "I like this," she whispered. "Better than anything I've ever done."

He kissed her silken hair, knew the electric nearness of her, and nothing else mattered.

When the movie was over, they walked again; sunset brooded in the west; the air was warm and exotic, as if blowing from the far away, from a never, never land of strange, perfumed flowers. And the day had been long and sweet.

The cab swung into the paved semi-circle before the tall building. They got out. In the dim light, her dress glowed whitely; she stared up and up, her eyes widening with the vast height of the building.

"It's on the roof," he whispered to her, as soon as he had paid the cab.

"I'm—I'm afraid," she half whimpered.

"It's only a dance," he said.

They walked into the hotel and through the huge lobby, feeling, in that moment, alone against the world. She pressed to him as if for protection. Beautifully dressed people moved around them, so rich with assurance.

They crossed the foyer; they entered the elevator with an elderly man in a tuxedo; "The Top," the man said, as if he were accustomed to saying it.

Nick wondered if he had enough money. He had heard that this was an expensive place.

"Ohhhhh," she said as the elevator began to move.

The elderly gentleman looked at her strangely.

Nick patted her arm and smiled at her; she smiled back, uncertainly.

When the elevator sighed to a stop, the operator slid open the door. The three passengers stepped out.

The sight of the room; the music; the muted sigh of conversation; the lights; the women with their jewelry; the reflection in the curved mirror of the bar; the smell of food; the deep, blood-red, silencing carpet.

She seemed overcome with the bright glitter of it. He felt cold and a little frightened with the strange glamor of it. It was something like a movie set; unreal, like that, to him. He wondered how the men moved with such poise.

After a few moments, the head waiter came to them; he raised his eyebrows as if to ask if they had a reservation, then he seemed to reconsider. "A table for two, sir?" he asked.

"Yes. . . . Please," Nick said.

"If you'll come this way, sir. . . . ?"

They followed him.

And they were seated. The table was small and secluded.

He sat very stiffly, waiting, very conscious of his shiny suit. She turned immediately toward the dance floor. She watched the dancing bodies mold together in waltz rhythm; she swayed with them, and her eyes were wide and starry with rapt attention. She turned back to him. "I never knew it was this wonderful," she said, "and it almost makes you wish . . . ."

"Wish what?" he asked, after a moment.

She studied his face as if memorizing it; her eyes seemed suddenly turned sad. "Nothing, Nicky," she said.

Eventually, the silent waiter handed them huge, elaborate menus.

He glanced at his and felt a momentary sickness; it passed, and he was ashamed of it.

"Would you like to eat?" he asked, but his voice sounded thin to his ears.

She stared across the menu at him. "Silly! We've already eaten: have you forgotten?"

"Yes, that's right." He tried a smile at the waiter that didn't quite come off. "A drink, then?" he asked her.

"Should we?"

"This once," he said. "What would you like?"

"Whatever you'd like."

"Champagne," he said, because he had read that men who felt like he felt should buy champagne for the girl they felt that way about.

The waiter bowed. "Yes, sir." He began to name champagnes.

Nick listened, repeated the fifth name after the waiter; he hoped it would be all right.

When they were alone again, he looked across at her.

"Darling," he said, surprised at his own courage.

"Yes?" Her lips were shining red.

"Darling, I . . . I . . . I . . ." He knew perfectly well what he wanted to say. He was annoyed to find that his voice refused to respond. The moment passed. "Do you like champagne?" he finished desperately.

"I don't know. Do you?"

"It's—all right."

"If it's what you like, I'll like it too," she said.

After the wine was in their glasses, he raised his and sipped to her. "It's all funny-bubbly and sour," she said. Then hastily, "But I like it, Nicky; I really do."

His hand curled the stem of his glass; the vessel seemed springily cushioned on the heavy whiteness of the tablecloth.

"Nick," she said. "Every minute's been wonderful." Color came into her checks.

He looked down at the rising, breaking bubbles and spoke to them softly. "I don't know how to say this. I've never said it before. I wouldn't say it to any other girl, ever." He was surprised to hear the words; and glad and afraid. "Mona," he said, "I'm in love with you. I've known it for hours." He did not look up.

There was silence; he thought he heard her sigh, wistfully.

"Nicky, Nicky. I knew I loved you when I saw you there, fixing that poor, little bird."

He looked up, then.

"But Nick," she said, "I'm afraid that you . . .

"No. Don't spoil it. Don't say anything. Right now. We'll have to say things later. Be still and listen, now."

They listened; and then they danced; they danced on a carpet of clouds.

"Hold me tight," she whispered, "very tight, and say that you love me."

She danced airy and delicate and snuggled warmly, and her white dress flowed in animated grace, coming alive around her.

The room glided away and back, to the dip and swoop of the waltz, and she followed him, her head thrown back slightly, her lips half parted, her eyes lightly closed and fluttering.

He found himself dancing slowly toward the door and out of the room, onto the open terrace, into the pale moonlight of the waning moon. It seemed, almost, as if, somehow, she had led him, very gently.

They stopped dancing and walked to the edge and looked down on the city sparkling there under them.

She was warm in his arm.

He turned to her, looked down into her wonderful eyes, and the stars of the city and the sky, too, were there.

Her face seemed alive with the moment, in a life drawn from all the wonderful, eloquent silences of vast nature; her delicately molded features were impossibly perfect; and her skin was smooth and life-blood warm. And yet, there was sadness there, too.

"Mona," he whispered, "will you marry me?"

"I—don't know," she breathed softly. "Oh, Nick, I do so hope so!"

"I don't understand," he said.

"I—want—to," she said very slowly. "Only I couldn't come down here. You see, I only know one job. But maybe, in a little while, in just a few years, you could get a transfer and come to Nebraska."

"Mona," he said, "you wouldn't have to work." He felt her stiffen in his arms. "Of course, at first, it might be hard." He went on talking, but he knew she wasn't listening. "But I can get promotions; I know I

can, if I have you to work for. . . . I'm not making very much now, but maybe in a couple of years, I'll be a foreman, and then . . ."

She drew away. "Oh, Nick, oh, no." Her voice was a choked sob. "I thought . . ." She checked herself. "And then I was afraid that you . . ." She looked up at him and said, in a whisper, "Nick, what is your job?"

"It isn't much, now, darling, but . . ."

"Please, Nick. What is it?"

"I'm a mechanic," he said; it made him feel miserable; because he knew that was not what she wanted to hear.

She moaned. "I—I was—afraid. . . . No. I guess I knew, down deep, from the first, that you weren't . . . But I wouldn't believe it. I wouldn't *let* myself believe it. In the city, I was almost sure, once, but I couldn't ask you. When—I saw you—in the park—with that—that bird, I thought your job was to—to fix all the little birds and animals that got hurt—and then when you said, 'before the *people* come to the fountain', I was almost sure, for a little while, and then afterwards, I was afraid to ask, when I wasn't sure any more. But . . .

"You weren't; you aren't," she finished hopelessly.

"Mona," he said, "please don't say those things. You're talking nonsense."

She shook her head. "No, Nick. Not nonsense."

She began to cry. She stood very still and very straight. Her lower lip trembled. "Nick," she said, "it's been the most wonderful day ever; and I'll never forget it. Not ever."

"Nick," she said, very softly, "I'm sorry I did this to you." She started to put out her hand to caress his face, and then she drew it back without touching him.

He swallowed and wanted to touch her and take her in his arms and say, "It's a dream, what you're saying, you don't mean it, you're just teasing me and you. . . ." But he said, "Mona, Mona, what is your job?" And he said it so low that she could scarcely hear him.

She looked deep into his eyes, and her lip was quivering.

"Oh, Nick, Nick. Darling." Her voice was an eerie whisper now. "Nick, I make snowflakes."

Suddenly he was alone.

He turned his eyes up to the mute stars. And he felt something soft and wet strike against his hot face; they were like gentle kisses; and he knew what they were.

*Would you kill God for a few pieces of silver?*

*Regan was a professional hunter. He shot what he was paid to shoot, and the rich, beautiful young woman wanted the head of the sacred red roebuck to hang on her wall. But when the hunter squinted down his rifle barrel he looked into the eye of God!*

## *Hunt the Red Roe*

by ALAN PAYNE

SOME THINGS, Regan thought, a man can do without feeling shame. Others, he cannot. And at this moment, sitting there in the dim cafe with the gray fog of Venus creeping through the streets outside, he felt that he had trapped himself into a deed which would prey on his mind for a long time.

They sat at a table far back in the corner, Regan and the woman named Mrs. Holloway. They were both Terrans. He was a hunter here on Venus, a tall spare man with hairy arms and thick, strong fingers and somber, gray eyes. She, on the other hand, was slender and soft, with sharp up-thrusting breasts and red, moist lips. Her greenish eyes had something of ruthlessness in them, and she clicked her fingernails nervously on the wine-glass. Her rich, green cloak contrasted sharply with Regan's sweat-stained shirt and trousers.

The barman dozed on a high stool. Regan watched the man's head sink lower and lower. It took his mind off the problem at hand. Finally, he realized that he could dodge the issue no longer, and he turned back to Mrs. Holloway.

"Does your husband know about this?" he asked grimly.

She laughed, a glassy, tinkling laugh, empty of emotion. "No. My husband is in Venusburg. I do what I please and I don't answer to him. I've got my own income, Regan, and I'm willing to spend part of it for your services. You were recommended as the best guide in the village." Her eyes bored into him. "Are you?"

He drained the last of his whisky. "I was, up until last season. Customers are dropping off. All the professional hunters have shipped to Mars. There are some new kinds of animals there."

She nodded with a faint hint of triumph. "You're broke, Regan. Is that right?"

"Yeah, I'm broke. Otherwise I'd tell you to go to hell."

illustrator: Gerald McCann



Her hand crept out and touched his wrist, warm, faintly perfumed. She seemed to sway forward across the little wicker table. "Regan, I've hunted every animal on Earth. I've had enough money all my life to do what I wanted, and there was nothing that pleased me more than chasing a beast and downing it. It's like playing God, Regan. A superior brain aginst an animal brain. . . ."

"And now you want to hunt the red roebuck," he said.

"What's so wrong in that?"

"Nothing," he said bitterly, "except that there aren't more than a dozen of them on the Preserve, and they happen to be the sacred animal of the Venusians. A religious animal. You know damned well. . . ."

She hesitated. Her eyes rested on the wine-glass, then raised abruptly to his once more. "Are you afraid? I'll pay you, Regan, so why be afraid?" Her tone grew mocking. "Unless of course you're a deeply religious man. . . ."

"Don't talk like that," he growled.

"Then answer me! Yes or no!"

He hesitated. He thought about his empty stomach, his dirty shack, his feeling that he was the last hunter in the village and that he was going to have to get money to ship out, or else starve. What the hell if it was a sacred animal . . . he . . .

"All right," he said quietly.

She nodded. "That's wonderful. Do you think we'll have any trouble? Guards? Anything like that. . . ." Her eyes gleamed brightly, greedily, and Regan did not like the look in them.

He pushed back his chair and got up. "No trouble at all. They don't guard the Preserve."

"Why?" She was startled.

"The Venusians are a trusting people," he said sarcastically. "They believe a Terran wouldn't shoot a red roc for the same reason a Venusian wouldn't go inside a Terran church and steal a gold cross. Trusting. . . ." He laughed shortly.

"It's sport, Regan," she said as she followed him out of the cafe and along the gray, cobbled street through the fog. "The sport of hunting . . . and stalking . . . and killing. . . ." Her voice dropped to a low, savage whisper and he saw her fingers clenched tightly until the skin of her palms was as red as the blood color of her nails.

They reached the small inn. He turned quickly to her. "Be ready at six tomorrow morning. We can reach the place by noon. You know what to wear. Anti-disease suit, all the rest."

She nodded. Her tiny pink tongue rested lightly on her lips for a moment. "Thank you, Regan. There may be more than hunting to be had."

Something recoiled within him. He turned sharply on his heel. "Six tomorrow," he said without turning around. He felt that her eyes were digging into his back, watching him as he walked along the street. What the hell, Regan, he kept saying, you've got to ship out. Are you religious? What the hell difference does it make? . . . What? . . .

But somehow, deep down in his mind, something was sick at the idea.

He reached the wall at the edge of the village. The Old Beggar was there, a gray-skinned Venusian holy man, blind, whom the villagers believed had prophetic powers. The Old Beggar lifted his ugly, gray eye-pits and raised his bowl imploringly as Regan approached.

"Coppers," he wailed, shaking his matted hair, "coppers, Lord Regan. . . ."

Regan shivered and stopped. The Old Beggar had an uncanny way of recognizing people in the village by their steps. It made him nervous. Reluctantly, Regan dug down into his jacket pocket and came up with three of the triangular shaped coins. He tossed them into the bowl and started to walk on.

The Old Beggar did not utter his customary word of thanks. His sightless eyes stared down at the bowl, his mouth hung slackly open, and abruptly he turned the bowl upside down and dumped the money out onto the muddy earth. He let out a high, piercing howl and one finger pointed shakily at Regan.

"Unclean!" he howled. "Defiler! Killer of the red roe!"

Regan's stomach jerked up into knots. His fists clenched and he stared down at the old man, trembling. "Unclean!" the Old Beggar shouted again. Regan wanted to hit him, silence him, but something held him back. With unexplainable terror singing through every nerve in his body, Regan turned and ran out through the wall, and he did not stop until he had reached his shack at the edge of the jungle. He raced up the steps, slammed through the door, closed it and stood with his back against it, panting.

Karal turned around from the tiny stove where he had been cooking the noon meal. His gray eyes went open in surprise. "Lord Regan!" he said quickly, rushing forward. "What has happened?"

"Nothing, nothing. . . ." Regan waved his hand and then rubbed his eyes. Karal stood before him, a slender, gray-skinned Venusian boy about fifteen years old. He was Regan's helper on the hunts. Years before, Regan had found him floundering in the swamps upcountry, and had

pulled him out. Karal, lost from his family who had been slain on a hunting expedition, seemed almost dead. From the time of the rescue, Karal had bound himself to Regan with stubborn and grateful loyalty.

Regan stumbled forward and sat down at the rough, jungle-wood table. "Get me some coffee, will you?"

Karal hurried to the stove and returned with a cup of the steaming brown liquid. Regan gulped it hastily. He kept his eyes on the tabletop. Somehow, he couldn't look at Karal. Finally he said, "Get the stuff ready for tomorrow morning. Load up the truck."

Karal's eyes gleamed excitedly. "A trip? A hunting trip?"

"Yeah," Regan said quietly. "A hunting trip."

"Where are we going?"

Regan stared hard at the boy. "The Preserve."

"The . . ." An expression of shocked horror swept across the boy's face.

"That's right," Regan said quietly. "We're going to get a red roe."

The boy lowered his head. He shook it unbelievingly. "Lord Regan . . . I . . . the red roe . . . that is forbidden . . . my people and their religion . . ."

"Listen," Regan said sharply, "there isn't any law says you can't shoot one of them. I need money and I've got a client who wants a red roe. I know how your people feel about it, but I'm a Terran and if you want to get out, go ahead."

There was sick disappointment in the boy's eyes. He was silent for a moment. Finally, he spoke. "No, Lord Regan. I have bound myself to you. I will go. . . ." He rose and walked slowly to the door. "I will make the truck ready," he said as he vanished through the door.

Regan sat staring into his cup of coffee. That had been hard, hurting the boy. His mind teetered back and forth. He was walking into the Preserve and killing the animal without feeling . . . destroying a part of the native religion. But what about getting out of the village? That took money. He didn't want to starve. He . . .

Confused anger welled up within him. He lifted the filled cup and flung it hatefully against the wall. The cup rattled on the floor and the brown liquid spread out along the boards. Regan stared at it, his right hand opening and closing convulsively. Sweat droplets stood out on his forehead. "Goddam it," he whispered savagely.

Before dawn the next morning Regan, Karal and Mrs. Holloway rolled out of the village in the truck. All three were dressed in the gray, rubberish anti-disease suits. The rear of the truck was loaded with Regan's weapons,

ammunition, cooking equipment and Mrs. Holloway's three Webb-Dangerfield Tri-power magnesium rifles. When Regan saw her equipment at the little inn, he allowed himself a faint feeling of admiration. The weapons were expensive. But they were also the very best in big-game hunting rifles. It was Regan's dream that some day he could afford a Webb-Dangerfield.

The truck rumbled through the bumpy streets. Mrs. Holloway, her blonde hair brushed back and tied at the nape of her neck, looked straight ahead, smoking. Karal sat staring glumly at the dash panel. He had said few words since the previous noon, and it made Regan feel all the worse. He had lost the boy's respect, and he knew it.

"How long will it take us to reach the Preserve?" Mrs. Holloway asked as they rolled through the edge of the village. Her eyes shone with expectancy.

"About two hours," Regan replied heavily.

"Good." She laughed a tiny laugh.

To the left, Regan saw the circular tabernacle where the Venusians held their religious ceremonies. Through the open cab window and above the rumble of the motor, he heard a high, reedy piping of voices. The morning ceremony, he knew. Before them the thick veil of fog lifted. The headlights, as Regan spun the wheel for a turn, struck the tabernacle door. Carved into the pillars, Regan saw the figure of the sacred animal in various poses. The red roebuck, drinking, running, standing. . . . He turned his eyes quickly and jerked the wheel around. The tabernacle and the singing were lost in the fog as they left the village behind them.

Two hours. Two hours of silent traveling, with only the roar of the motor. Two hours, while the dank rotting jungle rolled past, while occasional slimy rain ran in gummy streaks down the windshield and was cut away by the acid-coated wipers. Two hours, with the woman stretched out on the seat beside him, her long fleshy legs reaching under the dash, her eyes hungry. Two hours, with the boy Karal hanging his head, staring out the window with eyes that were strangely dead. Regan's fingers were tension-white where he gripped the wheel. Two almost unendurable hours.

At last they made camp in a small glade. Regan cooked the meal of artificial beef and vegetables. Mrs. Holloway stalked up and down the glade, slapping her gloves on her thigh, and Karal moved noiselessly back and forth, obeying Regan's commands but not speaking. As they drank their coffee, Mrs. Holloway glanced up at the fog-shrouded crowns of the trees.

She threw down the coffee cup and got to her feet. "Look, Regan, how far are we from the Preserve now?"

He pointed wearily through the trees. "About an eighth of a mile."

"Then for God's sake let's go. I came here to hunt. That's what you're getting paid for. To lead a hunt."

Regan rose, kicked out the fire, and shouldered his rifle. "It isn't going to be much of a hunt, I can tell you that. The red roes are pretty tame. You'll just stand there and blast one down while it looks at you." He said the words bitterly.

She laughed again. "What's the matter, Regan? Getting squeamish about the native hymn singers?" The laugh rose, tinkling, brittle, sharp. He suddenly had a wild urge to bring down his rifle butt and smash her face in. But he caught hold of himself. Remember, Regan, the cash, his mind whispered. Cash, cash, *cash*. . . .

He grumbled something. She glared at him, and he knew that she was aware of his feelings. Something new shone in her eyes now. It was no longer the guide-hunter relationship. There was something like personal animosity between them. They both sensed it. Regan shivered.

A light footstep sounded behind him. He turned. Karal stood there.

"What is it?" Regan asked.

"Lord Regan," the boy said, keeping his eyes on the ground, "I wish to ask if I may be allowed to remain here."

"Why?"

The boy raised his eyes and stared hard at Regan. "I do not wish to see the red roe slain," he whispered.

"All right. Stay here," Regan said, conscious of the tense snarling quality of his voice. He turned to Mrs. Holloway. "Let's get this over."

He led the way out of the glade onto a narrow trail. Mrs. Holloway tramped along behind him, their boots making slogging sounds in the thick, greasy mud. Insects flitted around Regan, darting toward his face. He slapped at one and his hand came away covered with pulp and blood. He tramped on, the fog whirling in gray ropes around him, trying to forget the woman behind him. But he kept hearing the sound of her boots, kept hearing the small, tuneless melody she was humming.

The tall trees thinned out abruptly, and ahead of them were smaller, younger trees, delicately formed, with large sensuous blossoms drooping in the steamy air. The colors were riotously flamboyant, blobs of green and gold and orange and sky blue hanging suspended from thin gray limbs. A heady wine-smelling perfume floated on the air. The place had

the appearance of a strange and alien garden, with the fog floating close to the ground.

Mrs. Holloway unslung the Webb-Dangerfield from her shoulder, threw the safety off and peered into the maze of small trees. "Is this the Preserve?" she asked quietly.

"This is it," Regan replied. Wearily, he unslung his rifle also and got it ready for firing. "We might as well go in, Mrs. Holloway."

She turned to him, her eyes narrowing in the shadowy gloom. She studied him and the harsh corners of her mouth curled upward in a little smile. "You're afraid," she whispered, almost wonderingly. "Regan, you're afraid."

"That's right," he said softly, and started to walk forward.

This was another world, this strange and brilliant garden in the midst of the gray jungles. Large fan-plumed birds sat on the blossom-covered branches, singing in high, clear tones, spreading their tail feathers and puffing out their chests. The boots of Regan and Mrs. Holloway stirred eddies of fog.

Abruptly Regan stopped. A shape materialized in the fog up ahead. With a finger to his lips, Regan started forward again. They had not taken more than a half dozen steps when he stopped a second time and pointed. "There. The red roebuck."

The beast was directly in front of them, with its head turned in their direction. Regan breathed in a wondering sigh. He had never seen one before. Almost miraculously, the mist had parted and the beast stood there, its magnificent reddish coat glowing softly, its great rust-brown horns thrusting up from its head. The snout was long, and the eyes were brown-red, large, shot through with flecks of gold. They looked . . . Regan shivered . . . they looked almost human.

The beast certainly resembled a Terran roebuck, but it was evident that this animal was much, much different. The strange glowing coat, the eyes that seemed to thrust into Regan's soul, full of peace and gentleness . . . they were not of Earth. This was a beast of a strange world. A beautiful beast.

Mrs. Holloway laughed, and Regan suddenly felt as if he had been sprayed with filth. He turned toward her, to tell her again that the beast would not run, and that all she would have to do was shoot it down where it stood. There was a smile on Mrs. Holloway's wet, red lips as Regan turned. The Webb-Dangerfield was pointed straight at Regan's belly.

"What the hell . . ." he whispered.

"Regan, I've found better sport than the red roe. You!"

"Listen, Mrs. Holloway . . ." He took a step forward. She tensed.

"I'll shoot you, Regan. I'm serious."

"What's the game?"

"Still the roebuck." Her mouth curled into the devil-smile. "But I want you to kill it for me. I want you to shoot it down, Regan. *You!*"

He let out a curse and started forward. The Webb-Dangerfield exploded. He was blinded for an instant as the sizzling ball of white-hot fire ripped by his shoulder, scorching the rubber suit.

"You don't want to die, Regan," she said. "You want to live. You're a weak man, Regan. Just kill the red roe, and I'll pay you double. *Double*, Regan. And give you one of my rifles. In my world, Regan, there is nothing but sport. Pursuit of sport. I've never found anything like this before. I mean to take advantage of it. . . ."

"You're crazy," he whispered.

"Perhaps I am, a little," she replied. "But who isn't, in one way or another?" Her tone grew commanding. The round muzzle poked at Regan. "Go ahead. Raise your rifle and kill the animal."

It would be so easy, he thought, quickly and terribly. Easy, Regan, easy, you'll get out alive if you do it for her. And a Webb-Dangerfield in the bargain. Think, man, think. . . . He turned slowly to stare at the roebuck, waiting there before them, its coat shining, its eyes full of that strange, magnificent peace and gentleness.

He swallowed. His stomach was cold. Unsteadily, he raised the rifle in the direction of the roebuck. "That's it, Regan," he heard Mrs. Holloway crooning, "that's it, Regan, go ahead, go ahead, kill it, kill it, kill it, Regan. . . ."

His finger tightened on the trigger. The sweat ran down under his arms. The eye of the roebuck was centered in his ring sight, large, round, brown-red, flecked with gold. Suddenly, Regan thought of the Old Beggar at the wall of the village, of Karal the boy who had been his friend. He thought of the tabernacle and the reedy voices and he thought of this mad woman holding her weapon trained upon him.

He squinted down the barrel. Somehow, the beast's eye seemed to grow, grow and enfold him. That eye, so full of peace, so full of a gentle spirit, a spirit of humble patience . . . a spirit . . . Something whispered in Regan's mind in a voice of terrible fear, That is the eye of God. *That is the eye of God!*

And his stomach jumped and revolted at the thought of slaying the beast.

He whirled, and Mrs. Holloway's head was in the ring sight of his weapon.

She screamed and fired. The blast ripped out in white fury, blinding

him, and he felt fire tear his leg. He ground his teeth together to keep from screaming with pain. Mrs. Holloway was cursing him obscenely, wildly, and readying another blast when Regan fired. The thunder echoed and re-echoed through the tiny garden. Slowly, the blinding glare vanished from before his eyes and he lowered his rifle.

Mrs. Holloway was spilling her blood out onto the ground.

Wearily, feeling the pain in his leg, seeing the scorched black hole in his flesh, Regan turned back to the red roebuck. It still stood there, its feet caught in fog, its mighty head raised toward the sky, listening. Regan threw his rifle to the ground.

The roebuck stood still for one more split instant, and then it leaped, long and far, rising up and up in its great leap and disappearing into the fog and the blossom-laden garden. Regan took one more look at the dead, mangled corpse of the woman, and turned and walked back toward the truck.

Karal rose from the ashes of the dead fire to meet him. Anxiously, he looked at the ragged black wound in Regan's leg. The hunter stood looking down at the boy. "The roebuck is alive," he said. "We did not kill it." The fires of faith relit themselves in the boy's eyes.

Karal drove the truck back to the village. Regan ordered him to drive to the wall. There Regan, his body filled with terrible pain, climbed down and approached the Old Beggar. The Venusian lifted his sightless face. Regan stood before him, tottering.

"I'm clean," he gasped. "The roebuck lives. . . .

"I know." The Old Beggar nodded his head slowly. "Peace, Lord Regan," he whispered.

Regan turned around, the pain welling up in him, took a step, and teetered forward. The muddy earth rose to meet and swallow him . . .

Gradually the ragged wound healed. There was talk in the village, much talk. But one day a rocket burned down out of the gray fog, and a thin, small, gold-spectacled man in a rumpled white suit appeared at Regan's bed. His name was Vincent Holloway. Regan told his story, omitting nothing. When it was over, Holloway told the hunter of even more terrible things, of the strange savage he had found in the woman who had been his wife in name only. Mrs. Holloway had even spent one year in an asylum on Mars. The small, gold-spectacled man had sad, regretful eyes when he went away. Vincent Holloway collected a suitcase full of clothing from the inn and got back into the rocket and vanished in a trail of orange fire among the fog-hung tree crowns. The jury of Venusian governmentals inquiring into the woman's death returned the decision of self-protection.

Regan still had two Webb-Dangerfields in the truck. He sold one. That bought passage to Red Sands on Mars, for himself as well as for the boy Karal. The two of them got on the rocket, Regan leaning unsteadily on a cane, but feeling the fibres of his leg knitting, healing, growing back together. Regan stood at the watchport as the rocket rose from the village. His hand rested on the boy's shoulder. He stared down at the jungle, glad he was leaving, tremendously glad to leave the tiny village, the jungle, the fog-world. The engines drummed as the rocket rose toward the top of the fog.

Regan stared down and down into the swirling grayness, and one thought went around and around in his mind. He knew he could never forget. Something in his soul had been wrenched forever. Where he had been only stumbling before, now he was certain. There was a something in him that now told clearly the difference between good and evil in a man's life. A something that was round, gold-flecked, full of peace and gentleness. And as the engines thundered and the rocket rose, Regan thought, over and over, *it was the eye of God.* . . .



illustrator:  
Everett Raymond Kinstler



everett raymond kinstler

Sam's little boy was only three years old. He stood there in his T-shirt and shorts, his hair messy, strawberry-jam stains all over his lips. He didn't come up to Sam's belt buckle. But he looked at his father sternly, and the words crackled coldly from his taut lips:

"Go to your room!"

Sam didn't feel insane. Yet there was a frigidly adult gleam of righteous anger in little Henry's eyes. And the world outside had become a topsy-turvy place where anyone over thirteen could be considered senile and a candidate for euthanasia.

It almost made one approve of infanticide. . . .

## *Crack of Doom*

by MILTON LESSER

SAM WEBER got his first shock early in the morning. He padded softly down the hall, past the door to Henry's room, on his way to the bathroom. He heard Henry call:

"It's all right, Pop, I'm up. Come on in."

Little Henry sat up in bed, dressed in shorts and a T-shirt. His hair was combed neatly, with plenty of stickum, and his scrubbed, shining face wore an earnest expression.

"Good morning," he said. "For the present we'll keep things unchanged to a certain extent. Much easier that way."

Sam Weber's mouth fell open. Henry was three.

"Of course," Henry continued, "there'll be minor changes here at the outset. I'll want an allowance, for one thing. Nothing big, say, not for another year or so. Twenty dollars a week should suffice." He stood up and waddled over to Sam, punching at his father's kneecap playfully with a pudgy fist. "Don't worry, Pop. We'll get along fine. Just fine. Anything you want, let me know. I mean that: any little thing and I'll be happy to oblige."

Henry turned his back and reached for a book which was lying half-hidden under the coverlet. He opened it with a satisfied little sigh and proceeded to read. Sam peered over his shoulder and read the title. Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*, Volume I.

Mechanically, Sam walked on into the bathroom. He took off his robe and pajamas, draped them over a towel rack, stepped out of his slippers and climbed into the shower stall. His attempt at whistling was only half-hearted, and he gave it up after a few bars, concentrating instead on the pleasant cascade of warm water.

Afterwards he shaved and dressed, then headed for the kitchen. Martha had orange juice, coffee, and a plate of golden pancakes waiting for him.

"A little late this morning, Sam," she observed.

"I—I had a talk with Henry." It would be best simply to state the objective fact, to wait for further developments.

"How'd he take it, Sam?"

"Take what? Our talk?"

"No, silly. The trip. The strange orientation."

Sam never answered a question unless he understood it. Now he asked one of his own. "Did you know that Henry's been reading?"

"Certainly. It is a bit early in the morning, but he had me get Toynbee down from the shelf at about seven. He wants to do history this week, politics next week. Good idea, I think."

Sam was getting nowhere. He drank his orange juice and buttered his pancakes, digging in with a definite lack of relish. "Where's my bacon?" he said.

"You're joking, of course."

"No. No, I'm not. You know I don't like pancakes without bacon."

"Hah, hah. Actually, that's going to be the biggest problem. A lot of the economy here depends upon meat and meat products, and millions of people will be thrown out of work. Well, they'll get over it. In a few years everything will be fine."

Sam's household seemed on the brink of insanity, and he clung to the one thing which he could understand. "I want my bacon."

"Now, Sam, that's enough. I threw out all the bacon this morning. Steaks, too."

Sam stood up from the table. "Thanks," he said. "I'll grab a bite downtown." He left the pancakes in their plate, almost untouched.

"Well, suit yourself. Oh, Sam, do me a favor?"

"What?"

"On your way to the subway, stop in at the butcher's and cancel our account with him. We owe him fifteen dollars. Of course, he may not even be opened, but if he is, you cancel our account. Okay?"

Sam said it was okay. He had always left such matters in Martha's hands, and if she wasn't satisfied with their present butcher, he'd take care of it for her.

On his way out, Sam couldn't resist the impulse to peek into Henry's room. His boy's little head was still buried deep in Toynbee.

"Hello, Mr. Adams," Sam said. There was a big crowd in the butcher shop and, Sam noticed with some surprise, no meat on any of the counters.

"I'd, uh . . ."

"Like to cancel your business here? Naturally. I guess it will be interesting, looking for some other kind of work."

Sam felt dizzy. "Yes, that's it. We owe you fifteen dollars, Martha said. Umm-mm, why are you giving up the meat business? I always thought it was good . . ."

"Well, have your little joke, Mr. Weber. Fifteen, that's right. You know, I'm thinking of joining the police. I was an M.P. over in Korea. That is, if my son doesn't mind."

Sam thought it was nice, the way Mr. Adams would consult his son before he took any new job. He said so.

Mr. Adams smiled. "Nice of him to let me make my own choice, you mean. After all, he's only five, Mr. Weber. You know what *that* means."

Sam blanched. Maybe he had had the wrong idea on kids all these years. Maybe they grew up a lot faster than he realized in this modern generation. "Your boy read much?" he demanded.

"Read? Don't be silly."

Sam liked the butcher's answer. It made the world come spinning back, a little closer to reality.

"Of course he doesn't read, Mr. Weber. He doesn't have the time. He's started writing a book this morning, showing what's wrong with Einstein's unified field theory. It's a good theory, but not particularly sound. But I guess you know its flaws as well as my son Jerry. Thinks he can make a best seller out of it. . . ."

Sam mumbled something which was a cross between "Good luck" and a confused gurgle, took his receipt, and trudged out the door. He headed slowly for the subway entrance, but he changed his mind. He had seen enough of people, for a while at least, and although the taximeter would register a dollar fifty downtown, he could afford the luxury this one time.

It was a bright yellow cab with a little fat man at the wheel. "Where to, friend?"

"Bartlett Building," said Sam, and the cab purred out into the early morning traffic.

"It takes my breath away," the driver said.

"What does?"

"All these growing green things. What a beautiful world, so young and

fresh. And the way those flowers smell! Man, I could sniff them all day."

Sam thought the man had missed his vocation. He should have been a poet, or at least a gardener. "Yes," Sam agreed. "I always liked late May . . ."

"No. That ain't what I mean. It's everything, the whole world. What a change: couldn't be more than two billion years old, I'd say."

Sam didn't understand, but he'd be polite. "What couldn't be more than, uh, two billion years old?"

"This planet, stupid. This planet. Say, how old are you? You don't look more than thirty, not much more."

"I'm thirty-two," Sam said, mildly annoyed.

"Well, the way you talk, you could be past seventy. Me, I'm pushing forty-five, but I understand. My mother's a little confused, but even she can understand if I explain things to her real slow. Maybe you're sick. They said some people might get sick . . ."

"I am not sick," Sam assured him. But he wasn't too sure: he felt as if the whole world was crushing in on him from all directions, making it difficult for him to breathe. Perhaps the radio would help. Sam always liked to listen to the radio when he was feeling blue. "Why don't you turn on the news?" he suggested. "Should be able to catch the eight-thirty over W—"

"Sure," the driver said, and Sam heard the click of the radio button.

It would be his favorite commentator, Harry Groton, and already the prospect of hearing the man's familiar voice made him feel better. He listened.

". . . Sorry that there can be no commercial this morning, folks, but our sponsor was a producer of canned meat products. At any rate, let's get on with the news. The big item, of course—" Sam liked Harry Groton because he was so informal, just as if he sat next to you, chatting pleasantly about the doings of the day. "—is the fact that the transfer has been achieved so successfully. There have been reported a few isolated instances in which the subject's mind was temporarily deranged, and scientists even expect one or two cases in which there has been no transfer at all, although until now none has been reported.

"Also, we'll have to get used to the fact that our children are our mental superiors. But naturally, it makes good sense. The best minds should last the longest, especially in these difficult times . . ."

"Turn it off!" Sam cried.

"Huh? You just asked me to put it on. Better make up your mind,

mister. On, then off, then—aw, I think I'm gonna change my work. Well, here's the Bartlett Building. Better take it easy, friend. You heard what he said about deranged minds."

Sam paid his fare, then watched a middle-aged woman get into the cab with a little tot who could not have been two years old. Sam heard the child's voice quite distinctly:

"Museum of Art, please. What? Yes, Grandmother, we might as well see their art first hand. Only way to really understand their culture, and it's *our* culture now, you know."

Sam wasn't particularly hungry, but he thought that some sizzling bacon strips fresh from the griddle, toast, and coffee might make him feel better. He entered the revolving doors and walked through the lobby of the Bartlett Building, past the newsstand, the elevators, the shoeshine booth, all the way across the lobby to the little luncheonette in the rear. He even began to hum a little.

The sign stopped him cold. It was done crudely, in big red letters, but he couldn't miss it. It said:

*Don't worry! Come right in!*

*We serve no meat or meat products.*

Sam almost ran back to the elevators. He waited for the express that would take him to the eighteenth floor, watched the little knot of people gather, waiting with him. They all seemed normal—if any of them had heard or seen any of the fantastic, impossible things Sam had witnessed, they didn't look it. Sam suppressed a sob. What was it Harry Groton had said about deranged minds?

He didn't make up his mind until the elevator door opened. The little crowd of people began to enter, but Sam hung back, and finally the starter spread his arms across the entrance. "Sorry, sir. No more room. Next car, please."

Sam nodded absently. He didn't care. He didn't feel that he could take Mr. Southerton's shenanigans today, anyway. Martha's uncle Gregory (on her father's side, as he remembered it) was a psychiatrist, and perhaps the man might be able to help him. Nothing like psychoanalysis, of course—he didn't need anything as thorough as *that*. But perhaps he had been working too hard lately—Mr. Southerton had a way of driving him. Just a little talk, Sam thought, because he'd understand this thing much better . . . Perhaps all he needed was a little vacation.

He stepped into a phone booth, dialed home. The receiver buzzed three times in his ear, then it clicked. He heard Henry's childish treble.

"Hello?"

"It's me, your pop." Sam felt mildly ridiculous.

"Good morning again, Pop. What's on your mind?"

"I'd—I'd like to speak with your mother, please, Henry."

"Can't. She's out. Maybe I can help you. Say, this Toynbee is fascinating reading. Really helps to explain the culture, on all levels. I'll show you when you get home. Meanwhile, Mom went to the library to get me some more books—sent her after some history source material. Well, can I help?"

Sam began to sweat in the confined quarters of the phone booth. "I doubt it, Henry. I wanted your great uncle Gregory's address, but . . ."

"Where's the address-book?"

Numbly, Sam told him. There was a brief silence, then Henry's little-boy voice again:

"That's Gregory Thorne?"

"Yes."

"One-two-five West End, Pop. What do you want with a psychiatrist? Trouble?"

"No. No, nothing like that. Just some business." Sam felt more ridiculous all the time. "I'll see you tonight, son. And, uh, thanks."

Sam heard the boy say something about not mentioning it, then there was a little click, Sam hung up the receiver, and left the booth on unsteady feet. He wondered how long a thorough psychoanalysis took, wondered further if he could afford it.

Dr. Gregory Thorne was a small, balding man, with a small red spot on each cheek which almost looked like it was painted there. "Sam!" he said. "Sam Weber. Long time no see. Very long. Won't you come in?"

Sam said thanks and came in. He smiled weakly, but knew it was worse than not smiling at all.

"Hey, Sam, what's the trouble? You look scared to me—mighty scared. Go ahead, talk: I haven't got a patient coming in for about an hour. Anyway, I'm just the receptionist now—my granddaughter's taking over this mind business. Ever meet her? Cute little trick."

Sam groaned. "That's the trouble, Doc. Your granddaughter."

"Eh, what's that? What did she do?"

"How old is she, Doc?"

"Umm-mm, I don't know exactly. Around seven, I'd say. Yes, Jack and Mary got married in forty-two, then they waited a couple of years. Yes, about seven. Why?"

Sam spilled all of it, in a rush of words. He didn't know that kids

matured so fast, he said, but all of a sudden, today, they seemed as intelligent—more intelligent . . . Also meat. What the devil was wrong with meat? He couldn't get it anywhere. Not even a couple of strips of bacon. Not even at home from Martha. The butcher was going out of business. And everyone acted so—peculiar. The news broadcast made less sense than a scrambled jigsaw puzzle, and Henry Groton . . .

"Whoa, Sam. Take it easy. I get the general drift. Care to answer a few questions?"

Sam said certainly, he'd like to. He took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow as Dr. Thorne flicked a switch and called into the interoffice phone on his desk. "Betty? Want to come in, please?"

Sam heard the door open, and a scrawny little girl with freckles and buck teeth entered the room. Dr. Thorne was right—about seven. And she had the most earnest look on her face . . .

"Betty, this is Sam Weber, sort of a cousin's husband. I'd like you to listen for a while, and then see what can be done."

The little girl nodded, put her lollipop down in an ashtray. "Hi, Sam," she said. "It's funny how strong physical habit can be sometimes like this lollipop thing. I like it. Well, go ahead with it, gentlemen."

Dr. Thorne cleared his throat, lit a cigarette and puffed nervously. "Now, then, Sam, you say you like meat? You have a strong desire for it?"

"You bet, Doc. Just bacon, that's all I'd want for now. A couple of sizzling strips. . . ."

"Uh-oh," Betty mumbled, taking her lollipop out of the ashtray and sucking on it furiously. "Better go ahead, Grandpa Gregory."

"And children, Sam. You think it's peculiar that they're so intelligent for, ah, their years? Impossibly so, all of a sudden?"

Sam nodded. "Yes. Something like that. Sounds silly, I know. But all you have to do is look at Betty. Go ahead, look at Betty. I'm not crazy—it's the truth."

The girl put down her lollipop. "I'll take over from this point, Grandpa Gregory. Take it down in shorthand, please."

Dr. Thorne rummaged through a desk drawer and came up with a pad and pencil. "Go ahead," he said.

Betty's voice was just right for the part of Goldilocks in a school play. "Sam," she said, "what do you remember of your life on Alpha Centauri Gee?"

"I—uh. Hey, Doc, cut it out! If this is a gag, please get on with your questions."

"It isn't a gag," Dr. Thorne said, suddenly very serious. "Answer her questions as well as you can."

"Well, I—oh, this is stupid."

"Answer me," Betty told him. "Please." She worked the melting lollipop back and forth from cheek to cheek inside her mouth.

"Well—I don't remember a thing. I don't even know what you're talking about. What is Alpher Century G?"

"Never mind," Betty told him. "Another question. Do you resent children being your mental superiors?"

Dr. Thorne said, "It was necessary, you know. There's bound to be some difficulties the first generation or so, Sam, and we figured the longer our better minds lasted, the better off we'd be. Those poor Earthmen—suddenly transferred to our bodies, on a cold, dry desert of a world. I wonder what they think . . ."

"Please be quiet, Grandpa," Betty said. "I'm asking the questions, and you'll only confuse him. I think I know what happened, too." She shook her head sadly, took the white stick from her mouth and put it in the ashtray. "I think I'll take up smoking," she said.

"Please," Sam said, not without difficulty. "I think I'll go home." He stood up.

"In a little while," Betty told him. "We'd like to do something first; only take a minute, Sam. Okay?"

Sam nodded vaguely, and they led him into the next room. "Lie down on that couch, please," Betty said. "We'll give you a quick temporal EEG."

Dr. Thorne nodded. "Electroencephalogram, eh? And then you'll . . ."

"Please get him ready, Grandpa."

Dr. Thorne dabbed the area in front of Sam's ears with something wet and slimy, then he placed something over Sam's head which looked like a couple of sturdy, curving wires with a small antenna for each temple. From this a wire ran to a drum covered with graph paper.

Sam felt nothing, but in a few moments it was over. Dr. Thorne took the antennae from his head, and then he was busy bending over the graph paper with his granddaughter.

"See?" she said. "See. Plenty of low magnitude, quick stuff, Alpha, Beta, and Gamma. But you don't see any Delta waves, do you. Look, there isn't a wave here with a frequency of less than ten a second, and most of them are more."

"Tch-tch," Dr. Thorne shook his head. "A shame."

"Umm-mm. It's simple to see what happened. Actually, the transfer ex-

perts expected this. Probably there are a few hundred of them all over the planet, men like Sam here, who haven't been transferred. He's still an Earthman, Grandpa."

"So? So what can be done about it?"

"Unfortunately, he can't be helped. The transfer is a finished product now. Nothing can be done. Of course, he can't be permitted to remain. Look at the simplest things, Grandpa. He eats meat. *Meat*. He eats it. Probably a hundred other little things. He couldn't be happy now, ever."

"Well what can we do?"

"Nothing. It's not up to us at all. There are the authorities. Elimination probably will be painless . . . Has he got a child, Grandpa?"

"Yes. A son, about three, I think."

"Obviously, a brilliant mind. You can send Sam home now, but notify his son by telephone. Poor Sam."

Sam didn't know what was going on. He had a few drinks first, and then he took a long walk in the park. He bought a bag of peanuts and fed the pigeons for a time, and then he grew tired of it. He'd take Martha and little Henry to the country. Although Dr. Thorne hadn't prescribed anything in particular, Sam knew he needed a vacation, a long vacation. But that girl, Betty. It was eerie. And Sam didn't relish the idea of going home to his suddenly brilliant little son.

He entered their house by the side door, and he heard Martha in the kitchen, weeping. "Hallo!" he called. "I'm home."

Martha ran into his arms and hugged him for a moment. "My Sam," she cried. "My poor, poor Sam."

"Easy, Martha. Nothing's wrong with me. Nothing that a little vacation won't fix. By the way, I stopped in at Adams' and canceled your orders there."

"Thank you, Sam. Thank you . . ." And then she was crying again.

Henry came into the room, looking ludicrously grim for his three years. "Hello, Pop. I'm sorry," he said.

Martha wailed, "It isn't fair . . ."

"One of those unfortunate things," Henry told her. "You'll get over it. It's just too bad that the only way we'd get the transfer in this way—with the memories of these Earth people, with their emotions. But you'll get over it, Mother. Stop sniffling. It will all be over soon."

Sam stood by, saying nothing, balancing on one foot and then the other. Henry looked at him. "Pop, you'll have to go to your room now. Please go to your room."

The boy still wore his tee shirt and shorts. His hair was messy and he had strawberry-jam stains all over his lips. The top of his head didn't come up to Sam's belt buckle. He said, again, "Go to your room."

Sam turned and walked from the room. He heard Martha sobbing again, but he did not wheel about to face her. He continued on up the stairs, entered his bedroom, and closed the door behind him. He sat for a long time on the edge of the bed, looking out into the bright sunshine, watching the very old men and women playing with their mudpies in the street.

He must have dozed. When he awoke, he saw two green and white cars pulling over in front of the house. Police. They were very grim.

Sam heard voices. "Does Henry Weber live here?"

"I'm Weber," Henry told them.

"Your father is . . ."

"Yes. Still human. No transfer, unfortunately. The EEG clearly shows it. I'm afraid he'll have to be . . ."

"Of course, sir. He will be eliminated as painlessly as possible. Downtown, a bullet in the brain at point-blank range. Quite painless, I'm told."

"The best way," Henry said in his childish treble.

Sam heard them coming up the stairs, slowly, with their measured steps. Something told him, quite suddenly, that this was more than a hideous joke. Much more . . .

There was silence. They stood outside his door a long time, and then the door opened, just a thin crack. Sam saw an eye peer within the room.

The crack opened wider and he saw his son Henry's little face. Behind the face he could see some uniformed blue figures.

Sam smiled bravely. He pushed at the door and the crack opened all the way, admitting Henry and the policemen.

Henry looked just like a little man.





## *The Space Ark*

*GUNNER CADE.*

By Cyril Judd. New York:  
Simon and Schuster. 218 pp.  
\$2.75.

Romantic writers have used endless reams of paper to describe the dashing, gallant, ultra-chivalrous life of the young male in the Middle Ages. Legend has it that he was a clean-cut New Haven-Cambridge type of fellow, with his strong hands on the hilt of his sword and his happy eyes fixed philosophically on the far horizon. But more accurate historians tell us that the Medieval era was not really a very nice time in which to live, unless you were a power in your land.

True, crusades were fought, and adventure was to be had for the asking. But small groups of untouchables ruled in high places, and the masses of men suffered under their spurs.

Cyril Judd has resurrected the

Middle Ages. But the world which he has created on paper is one equipped with supersonic, atomic, ultra-modern and extra-deadly equipment. Gunner Cade, his protagonist, however, can easily be mistaken for a member of a chivalric court. He serves his system with faithfulness; he is utterly blind to the corruption and immorality which rages behind the thin veneer of hypocritical piety affected by the higher echelons of his society; and even as he allows himself to be used, he glories in his services and bathes his soul in a warm, lulling sense of selflessness and dedication.

It is when he is shown the artificiality of his world and begins to strive against the mores and folkways which keep his people under the mailed thumbs of the ruling hierarchy that the novel begins to move.

*Gunner Cade* is the story of the awakening of a citizen of a

slave world. As such, it is very appropriate reading today, in an era when the democratic and totalitarian systems are becoming more and more irreconcilable.

*THE LONG LOUD SILENCE.*  
by Wilson Tucker. New York:  
Rinehart and Company. 217 pp.  
\$2.50.

Basing his theme upon the premise that when one gives two little boys loaded pistols one may very well be repaid with a hole in his head, Wilson Tucker has written a very interesting, rather savage account of what could happen if the United States were to become a target for atomic bombing.

Tucker's protagonist is a well-rounded, self-centered heel. Russell Gary's chief concern in life is Russell Gary. At one end of his sphere of interests is a whisky bottle; at the other end is a naked woman. Gary's existence prior to the opening chapter of *The Long Loud Silence* seems to have been perpetual dissipation with first one, then the other, then both.

It is when he rouses himself from a drunken sleep which terminated a three-day orgy that he discovers that the United States has been bombed by a foreign power. The world into which he walks from his third-rate hotel is

a world of death and desolation. Twisted corpses lie where they had fallen in the streets when the radiation washed over the city. Those fortunates who escaped death have little cause for rejoicing, however, for hard on the heels of the atomic bombs comes a plague which brings horrible death to many of the radiation survivors. A relative handful of people, of whom Gary is one, are for some biological reason immune to the disease. However, they are carriers of the plague germ, and inasmuch as only the eastern section of the United States was bombed, they are "quarantined" in the ruined area east of the Mississippi. Cordons of soldiers are stationed on the western bank, and anyone who attempts a crossing is shot mercilessly.

Once Gary realizes that he is cut off from the civilized world on the other side of the river he begins a long and dangerous campaign to remain alive. He forms a partnership with Oliver, an ex-teacher who is the embodiment of all the fine qualities which he himself lacks. Together they share the bed of a nubile hill wench named Sally, but when the girl becomes pregnant by one of them Oliver decides that a child should have but one father, and Gary agrees to move on alone. Around him there is

desolation, loneliness and a wild brutality run rampant.

And it is here that the writing is at its best. Elemental and gripping, the tale of how civilized man reverts to cannibalism and savagery is told tersely and with shudderingly realistic effects.

This is good science fiction. Upon finishing *The Long Loud Silence* this reviewer found himself listening for the drone of far-off motors and scanning the skies for enemy aircraft. We believe that this book should be printed in many languages — including Russian.

#### THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1952

*Edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty. New York: Frederick Fell, Inc. 288 pp. \$2.95.*

We would be not at all surprised if some of the best science fiction stories of the last year actually are included in *The Best Science Fiction Stories: 1952*. Usually, as is the case when we read newspaper lists of the ten best-dressed women in the United States, it gives us great pleasure to scan the listed names or titles and sneer down our pipestem at them.

But, along with the "just-fair" material which is to be found in all but the rarest of anthologies, Bleiler and Dikty can boast of some truly excellent tales in their collection, such as:

"*Of Time and Third Avenue,*" by Alfred Bester. A fine time-travel story with a new twist ending. We liked it both as a television play and as a magazine story.

"*The Other Side,*" by Walter Kubilius. This sustains a nice feeling of suspense and then has a horrible ending that makes you inspect very closely the person nearest you!

"*Generation of Noah,*" by William Tenn. An all-too-possible tale in an era when teachers train their pupils to huddle under school desks at the first super-bright flash.

"*The Pedestrian,*" by Ray Bradbury. Policemen make passes at a man with no glasses to indicate his TV-induced eyestrain!

There are other good ones, but as far as we're concerned one of the best features in the whole book is the introduction by the editors. It is scholarly, very interesting and erudite enough to indicate that Messrs. Bleiler and Dikty know the field wherein they work.

—NOAH GORDON



*There's no business like show business! You do one-night stands in one-horse villages. You sleep in flea-bitten rooming houses, eat sandwiches three times a day, ride from town to town in creaking busses whose springs went out with Coolidge. . . .*

*And all the time you have your eyes on a dream that keeps slipping over the horizon, and one day you wake up with no more bookings and you realize that maybe you'll never catch up to your dream. But then you meet a dark little man who promises to make you a star without even looking at you twice! It sounds too good to be true. . . .*

*It sounds out of this world. . . .*

Illustrator: Mort Lawrence

## *The Agent*

by STEPHEN MARLOWE

I WASN'T exactly the best crooner in the business, but I could sing, and they even told me I could make the dames' hearts palpitate if I tried hard enough. It wasn't my fault that I was out of a job just now, and not too far from trying to bum a meal.

So when I ran into Vera and Vera told me she had a job, I felt hopeful. Vera was an old timer on the stage, and now she had begun to sag in the wrong places—but she still insisted on lead-roles. The result was that Vera lost more weight than a dame with six months at a slenderizing salon behind her, and she was even hungrier than me.

"Mike," she said, "I got a job. Placed by a new agent. I never even heard of the guy, he comes outa nowhere. But he got me a job and the pay's good and I start soon."

"Honey," I said, "you just tell Mike all about it. Who is this guy?" I wanted to meet him—if he could place Vera, he could place anybody.

At this point, Vera noticed I, too, could use a few vitamins, so she bought me a hot dog. I overflowed the bun with mustard and sauerkraut, and then I said: "Well, where do I find him?"

"He—it's kinda a different sort of office, Mike. I'm going out there now."

I gulped the last chunk of bun. "Vera, you need a chaperon. Let's go, eh?"

Vera nodded, and I didn't even realize that she sagged in the wrong places. She looked beautiful.

It was a stupid place for an office. I wondered how the guy could do

business out here in the sticks. But I couldn't complain. He had given Vera the taxi fare and the trip took two hours—out into Pennsylvania somewhere, and the place was so deserted, there wasn't even a telegraph pole. But this office stood out there in the middle of all that wilderness, a big round barn of a place with a pasteboard sign out front. The sign said:

QUONTAS QUORON: *Theatrical Agent*

WANT A JOB? I CAN PLACE YOU.

Then, in smaller print:

*No experience necessary.*

Vera squeezed my arm as we got out of the taxi. "See?" she said.

"Honey," I said, "I wanna meet this guy."

The door of the big, round barn was high up off the ground, and we had to walk up a ramp to reach it. When we got inside, we weren't alone. There was a big room, swanky as hell, with indirect lighting and plush seats all around. This guy Quoron sure had the shekels. Maybe twenty people were sitting around, waiting, and because I've been around in this game a long time, I knew most of them. I didn't exactly teach Rudy Vallee how to sing, but I'm no youngster.

Here was just about the weirdest collection of theatrical has-beens. I saw them all—the would-be Shakespearean hams, the musical comedy stars who were on the way out when Oklahoma was nothing more than a state, the ventriloquists, singers, sword-swallowers, bearded ladies—everyone who had ever been on a stage and couldn't get back on one.

This Quoron was no dud, and word got around.

I said hello to a few people, but I kept it selective; I couldn't be associating with the riffraff of the profession who would wind up in a tank-town carnival somewhere, if Quoron could place them. He may have been a miracle man, but sword-swallowers were as passé as ragtime.

We all waited and I swallowed nervously each time I looked at the little door marked "Quontas Quoron, Private." My courage soared up and down like an express elevator. Every time I thought of how hard jobs were to get, I shuddered. But when I looked at sagging Vera and realized Quoron had placed her, I felt much better.

It was like the scene after the big act which leaves everyone gasping when the guy finally came out. I mean, we waited so long that we didn't know what to expect, and when the little guy came out it was sort of a letdown.

"I am Meldon Quoron," he said, "Quontas' brother. He'll be along soon. Meanwhile . . ."

He went into the old familiar spiel about jobs being hard to get and placement being necessary in out-of-the-way places, but I didn't give a damn. If he got me a job, I didn't care if it was in Squedunk—as long as he paid the carfare.

He was a little guy, almost as big around the middle as he was tall, and in his dark blue—almost black—suit he looked like a bowling ball. But his face was ridiculous—I noticed that now. The body was short and plump—he could make Costello look like Charles Atlas, but the face was angular. It was more than that—it was elongated. I never saw anything like it. His chin was long, narrow and pointed, and his nose could have been a small white salami. Then, at the top, his head started to come to a point; at least it looked that way, but it probably was the way he combed his hair. And anyway, this was stupid as hell. Here I was, out of a job, and unconsciously making fun of the guy who could maybe get me one.

I nudged Vera. "Ever see this guy before?"

She shook her head. "No. I dealt directly with his brother, but they look alike. Quontas is a little older, and fatter, and with a skinnier face. You'll see him soon."

"... and so," Meldon was saying, "acting is pretty much like any other job, and jobs are hard to come upon. If there were too many shoemakers in this town, and if you were a shoemaker, you'd go someplace else. That's the general idea . . ."

This guy Meldon seemed amiable enough, but he could have gone on all day, and I was glad when his brother came out. Like Vera said, he was shorter and fatter and he had a face even more elongated, like a big yam.

He was preceded by a secretary. She must have been a secretary or she wouldn't have been in front of him with a pad and pencil in her hand, but she would have made the girls at the old Minsky's turn green with envy. Vera looked her up and down and then sniffed.

"Cheap-looking hussy," she observed.

Preoccupied, I said yeah. But I've been around, and this dame had it.

The girl's voice could have got her a job in the top Broadway musical, and even when she spoke it sounded like singing. "Mr. Quoron," she said, "is ready to see you. One at a time."

Quontas Quoron bowed, and then he stepped back into his office, and the secretary said:

"Who's first?"

A little guy in one of the seats near the door got up, and a seal, oinking

like he had just seen a bathtub full of fish, followed him into Quoron's private office.

In less than a minute, the guy and the seal came out. Meldon was still talking, droning on about how hard it was to get jobs, but no one was listening. This time I didn't even hear the seal oinking, because the little guy said, "I got the job! I got the job!"

He must have been out of work even longer than me.

That went on for twenty minutes. Someone went inside, and a moment later, he came out, smiling and nodding his head. No one was turned down; everyone got a job.

Meldon was still talking when I walked past the secretary into his brother's office. Quantas Quoron sat at a big desk with a bottle of liquor in front of him.

"Drink?" he said.

I nodded and he poured me a stiff one. I downed it fast and a hot dog doesn't exactly fill your stomach, so the liquor went to my head pretty quick. And the odd part of it was that I had had a lot of drinks in my day, but I couldn't place this one. It wasn't bourbon, but it was more like bourbon than either Scotch or rye, and I shrugged. I wasn't going to be impolite, and maybe Quoron made home brew. I wouldn't be surprised at anything.

"What do you do?" he said.

"I sing. If you want, I can show you clippings from *Variations*. I've been around, Mr. Quoron, and most of the reviews are good. If you want I should sing now . . ."

I began to tune up my voice, but Quoron only looked irritated. "No," he said. "Please. It won't be necessary."

I shrugged. If he wanted to put me on without an audition, I wasn't going to argue.

Now he smiled, and his elongated head nodded up and down. "I'm sure you'll do," he told me. "There's no need for an—audition. There's only one thing . . ."

I frowned. There had to be a catch in all this. A guy just doesn't go around hiring everyone who comes looking for a job, placing them without an audition. Not in these hard times.

I sighed. "Okay, Mr. Quoron. What's the rub?"

"Rub?"

"Gimmick. Gimmick. What's the gimmick?"

"Eh?"

This guy was a rube. "I mean, what do I have to do to get the job?" "Oh. You don't have to do anything. Simply sign this."

He handed me a sheet of paper. I looked at it. Some kind of contract no doubt—and again I frowned. Long legalities always confused me. But here, happily, there only were a few lines, and I scanned them rapidly.

I hereby agree to accept the job which my agent, Quontas Quoron, has for me, and I further agree that the location of the position is of no consequence. It is understood, of course, that Quontas Quoron and his brother will provide means of transportation.

I smiled. "Hell, is that all?"

Quoron nodded and handed me a pen. "A pleasure," I said, and signed the paper with a flourish. Then I waited.

"There is something else, Mr. Hennesy?" Quoron demanded, looking at my signature.

I was a little dubious, and my face must have showed it. "Yeah. Yeah, there is. First, how much?"

"How much what?"

"How much do I get paid?"

"Umm. That's hard to say. It will be up to my client. But the important thing now is that I can guarantee you good living quarters and good food."

My stomach gurgled. He was right—that *was* the important thing. "But one more thing," I said. "How can you have this job for me without hearing my singing and without even contacting anyone about me? Er, you don't mind the question, do you?"

Quoron shrugged. "No. Why should I mind? I can assure you this: there is a great demand for your talent, and the job is a certainty. Any further questions?"

I shook my head.

"All right, Mr. Hennesy, just wait outside in the sitting-room with the others."

Outside, I sat in the plush chair next to Vera. "See?" she said. "What did I tell you? You got the job, didn't you? As easy as pie. I'll bet the Quoron brothers will be the top agents in the business pretty soon."

I nodded. Little Meldon was still talking about how hard it was to get jobs, and I wondered for a moment why he wanted to impress that on us so much. But then I shrugged, especially when the gorgeous secretary brought about refreshments for everybody. And this was surprising—the stuff looked like little cubes of candy, and you sucked on it like candy, only it tasted like filet mignon. But I wasn't complaining.

Meldon could talk all he wanted to. I wouldn't complain a bit. They had a job for me, and that's what counted.

Presently the last of the hopefuls came dancing out of Quoron's office, his ventriloquist-dummy riding jauntily on his shoulder. The dummy's head bobbed up and down, and the dummy said, in a high, squeaky voice. "We're hired. I don't know what they want with my lousy sidekick here, but we're hired."

I fidgeted about against the plush cushions. "Well, what do we do, just wait?" I directed the question at no one in particular, but Vera nodded. Vera had taken me to her sagging bosom, it seemed, since she had given me wind of this agency, and I didn't mind at all. If she were fifteen years younger, I could have loved the gal.

"Of course we wait," she said. "We don't want to be impolite."

For the first time, I noticed that there were no windows in the building. That struck me as strange, but I hardly had time to think about it. A buzzer sounded and a red light glowed above Quantas Quoron's door.

Meldon's head jerked up. He muttered, "That's all this trip, I suppose." And he disappeared inside his brother's office.

Then I jerked upright in my chair, and Vera screamed. A great peal of thunder ripped through the building, and the whole structure shuddered.

I patted Vera's hand. "Take it easy, honey. It's only a summer storm. Relax."

But that thunder had been close; I could still feel the structure shuddering. And then, suddenly, I was slammed back hard in my seat like some invisible giant had pushed me with a hand the size of a Greyhound bus.

"What the hell . . ." I started to say. But then I couldn't talk. I could hardly move and the words wouldn't come out. I could only move my eyes around slowly, and everyone was sitting around like I was, paralyzed.

In a little while, the giant hand lifted up. It did more than that—it lifted and took something with it, because, abruptly, I leaned forward, and I found myself *floating* off my plush-cushioned chair. Floating is the only word I can use, because that's what I was doing.

There were a lot of screams all around, and I could see most of the other people floating, too. Even the seal, and he was oinking like crazy. After a while, I learned. It was almost like swimming, swimming in water. This was crazy, this couldn't be happening—but I did a neat breast-stroke through the air and reached Quoron's door.

I pounded on it but it was locked, and then I kicked off again with my feet, but I kicked too hard and I hurtled across the room, bumping

into the far wall like a battering ram. A lot of stars exploded in my head, and then I felt myself floating down to the floor like a feather, only I never remember hitting . . .

I awoke slowly, like you do when you're having a bad nightmare, and I tried to shake my head to clear the stars out of it, but I couldn't. The giant hand was pressing against my chest again, and I couldn't move.

No one was floating any more. Everyone was on the floor, stationary, and Vera looked like she was trying to whimper, only no sound came out.

Then I heard the thunder, booming through the structure once more, and then, with a gentle bump, the giant hand was gone. I stood up and brushed my clothing off and, brother, was I furious. I didn't know what was going on, but I intended to find out. I almost ran to Quoron's door, but it opened before I could reach it, and Quontas Quoron stepped out.

"Well," he said, "we have arrived."

I stuck out my hand and prodded my index finger into his chest to say something, but there was just nothing to say. I didn't know what this was all about. And Quoron walked right by me, heading for the outer door.

He opened the door and I saw a lot of red light come spilling in, and when I strode over to the door I saw the craziest damned place . . .

Here on Mars, there are no cities like we have on earth. Instead, they have these long canals with urban and rural communities stretched out along them for hundreds of miles. You just keep traveling and traveling in one direction, and all you see is houses—but look off to the right or the left, and there's that rusty desert, a wilderness which would make the Sahara look like an oasis. These canals give the Martians water and life on a very thirsty planet. The water famine of 1950 in New York was a Deluge compared to the constant trouble here. But don't get me wrong: I like it here.

Here on Mars, there are no nations like we know them on earth, no international boundary lines, no wars, warm or cold, no disputes—just one huge planetary nation, extending along the network of canals. There's no time for squabbles: everyone's too busy keeping warm and getting enough water to drink. And in one huge net-work city there's an artificial supply of air, because Mars' atmosphere is too thin to support a kite. Ever have an oxygen jag? It's a lot more fun than bourbon. So I like it here.

And best of all, I like the status of Martian entertainers. . . . But before I go further, let me answer your question—yeah, sure, we're on Mars.

Quontas Quoron's "office" was a spaceship: the first earth interplanetary travelers came to Mars via a theatrical agent. Quontas Quoron is a Martian.

The most amazing thing is the fact that there *was* no entertainment on Mars. Don't ask me where Quoron got the idea, but it was a natural: all the Martians are too busy trying to eke out their existence. They have no music, no plays, no movies, no Minsky's, no sports, no television—not even the Martian equivalent, with pointed head, of course, of Milton Berle.

We couldn't miss. We were a success overnight, all of us—all except the poor ventriloquist who can't do much since he doesn't know the language. Instead, he's started an Actor's Equity for us, and already it's functioning better than it ever did on earth. Mars will do anything to keep us. We're wonderful. Everything is still pantomime because we don't know the language, but we're learning it. Even Vera is a hit. Sagging, dragging, round where she should be flat, and flat where she should be round, she's still the answer to a Martian prayer.

Popular? We gave them a pantomime of Romeo and Juliet last night, and Vera had 'em roaring for more. They don't applaud on Mars; they jump up and down, and, because the gravity is lighter here, a lot of pointy heads almost made a lot of holes in the ceiling of our brand new theater!

Me? I don't sing—I can't until we learn the language, and I'm learning that fast. Meanwhile, all I do is hum. Ever hear *All the Things You Are* hummed to an audience of screaming Martian females? I won't comment because I don't want to sound egotistical but Sinatra should see me now . . .

Tonight, Quontas Quoron had a bright idea. He's taking his ship back to earth for more talent. Or that is, he thinks he is. But Actor's Equity voted him down. He can bring in new talent: but only five people a year, and theatrical people of our choosing. They've got to be out of work and they've got to be guys and gals who won't conflict. Take me: one crooner on Mars is enough—we leave for the Northern Hemisphere tomorrow on the first swing of our Canal Circuit. And I wouldn't want to think there's another crooner here down south while I'm gone. All by myself I want to melt the ice cap out of every Martian gal's heart.

Vera just came in. Vera looks radiant, making allowances, of course. But anyway, it's all a matter of standards, and these Martian women, too busy with the nasty matters of water and temperature, are beauty-starved: as a sideline, Vera is starting a planet-wide beautician's organization.

And, as I've said, it's all a matter of standards. Everything is relative.

Vera looks more beautiful every day, and right now she's the most beautiful woman on Mars—that is, discounting Quontas Quoron's secretary—but technologically Mars has an advanced culture, and rumor has it that Quoron's secretary is a robot.

Pardon me, please. My wife is calling to me from our kitchen.

"What's that, dear? Tired? Well, why don't we turn in, Vera?"

You'll have to excuse us. Tomorrow there's a matinee. Vera and I will kill 'em!

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*They walked the streets of the same city, but they were separated by the ages. She feared the man she loved even as her arms clasped him to her. For when science presented Frank Ridley with the gift of never-ending life it made him desperately unhappy, and placed him in a world peopled by brief and flitting shadows. . . .*

illustrator: Everett Raymond Kinstler

## *Forever Is So Long*

by JOHN JAKES

AFTER A YEAR in the hospital, they gave Frank Ridley a new suit of clothes and a topcoat and told him he could go. Dr. Lord said they would call him when they wanted him, so Ridley put on the topcoat and walked through the doors and down the wide steps into the windy, sunlit morning.

He felt in the pocket of the topcoat, found cigarettes. His fingers caressed the material of the coat, as if it were entirely new to him. He broke open the pack and lit a cigarette. The smoke inside him was an almost new sensation, and he was pleasantly bewildered, like a small child. A year in the hospital, and he was a new man, but he had forgotten what life and the things of life were like.

But he had not forgotten her. All through the long months, while the doctors bent over him, while he lay half-dreaming in the life fluid, while the needles filled his veins with a new and mighty blood, he had remembered her face and her mouth and her hair.

Quickly, Frank Ridley began to walk. He looked at the buildings, at the towers, at the lake lying taut and blue in the sun. He saw the rockets burning up into the morning sky, bound for the Moon, Mars, Venus, carrying passengers and cargoes to the colonists. Gradually, he again became familiar with his native city of New Chicago.

Two blocks from the hospital, he found a street phone booth. It was empty. Eagerly, he crowded his bulky body inside and closed the door. Dialing information, he felt his breath come heavily.

The screen lit up and the face of the operator appeared.

"Number, please," she said, smiling.

"I'd like to call Miss Virginia Halloran. I . . . don't remember the number. She used to live at ninety-fourteen Lake Drive."

"I will try that address," the operator said.

Ridley glanced at the new gleaming wrist chron they had given him. A quarter after nine. Normally, women did not go to work in the Department of Fuel Statistics at the Rocket Center until ten. She should be. . . .

The screen blurred.

And he was looking at her.

She was not a beautiful girl, with her slender face and slightly thin lips. But there was an intangible something in her eyes that Ridley had seen in few women. A promise, perhaps, of fire and affection. He swallowed stiffly.

"Hello," he said.

She peered at him, not believing. "Frank . . . Frank Ridley . . . that's right, isn't it?"

"Yes, Ginny. It's me."

"It's been a long time, Frank."

"Yes. A year."

"What happened, Frank? I thought you were dead, or had gone out on the rockets. That night . . . my birthday . . . you never came . . ."

"I know, I know. I'll tell you about it. Could we eat breakfast? Couldn't you skip work? I want to talk to you. I . . ."

She nodded quickly. "Of course. Where?"

He tried to remember, and could not. "I can't think of any place we used to eat." He was ashamed, because he had only remembered her face through the dark, painful year.

"The Lake Front Cafe. Near Washington. Remember?"

"I'll find it. Half an hour?"

"All right." She hesitated. "Frank . . ."

"Yes?"

"What happened?" Her voice was soft, and her eyes in the screen were gentle and, somehow, full of loneliness.

"I'll explain when we eat. Ginny, tell me. Is there anyone else now?"

"No, Frank."

He tried to grin. "Half an hour."

She nodded again and the screen went blank.

He went out into the street, feeling the sunlight on his face and the wind pulling at his topcoat. Perhaps she still loved him. A year was a long time, but he could hope.

As he lit another cigarette, he felt with a terrible certainty that she would cease to love him when she learned the secret that lodged in his body. The secret that would, eventually, roar like thunder around Earth and out to the stars where Earthmen rode their rockets.

He turned and walked quickly down the street, and there was a sudden coldness in the morning sun.

She was waiting at a table on the terrace of the Lake Front Cafe. He walked up to her, almost shyly, and sat down. She smiled. A few feet beyond the table, the waters of the lake shimmered and made soft noises. A great rocket lifted across the skyline, trailing fire and smoke into the blueness.

They ordered coffee and Ridley gave her a cigarette. He was trying to make many small motions, trying to take up time, because he was afraid of what was coming.

She took a sip of the coffee and looked at him. "I still love you, Frank."

He glanced away. That was like her—the strange sense of honesty and naturalness that had impressed him at their first meeting. The feeling that their love was inherently right.

"I've been gone a long time," he said.

"Where?"

"In the Rocket Hospital."

She set down the cup, surprised. "Here in New Chicago?"

"Yes, all the time. I couldn't call you."

"Were you sick? Frank, I don't understand this. A whole year out of a man's life, and not a word . . ."

He reached out and took hold of her hand, squeezing it, because he was afraid that he would inevitably lose her, and he did not want that. He wanted to keep her, and the sunlight and the bright morning.

"I'm going to tell you what happened to me," he said softly. "I have Dr. Lord's permission. It'll be out soon enough. You mustn't tell anyone."

She frowned. "I won't."

"Do you know who Dr. Lord is?"

"The longevity man. Educated at the University of Marsport."

"That's right. My father was one of his best friends. They saw the asteroids together in their student days, working on an ore jumper. I've known Dr. Lord for a long time. Last year, when I came in from the Venus run and took my two months' leave . . . when I met you . . . Dr. Lord called me.

"He needed help, with an experiment. An experiment, he felt, that couldn't fail. He knew I was a jetman, and strong, and he knew me personally. He asked me if I would help him. I thought it would mean so much to people that I . . . I said I would help him. He said it would have to be done secretly. That's why I never called you, or wrote."

"You've been a subject for an experiment for a whole year?"

"That's right. The experiment was completed a week ago."

"Success?"

He nodded slowly and fumbled for a cigarette. He knew what her next question would be. He lit the cigarette and waited, watching the smoke whip away toward the lake.

"What kind of an experiment was it?"

"I don't know the details. They replaced my normal blood with some kind of fluid Dr. Lord had developed."

She waited, her lips slightly parted, her face bearing a faint trace of fear. The feather on top of her hat bobbed as she leaned forward.

He swallowed hard.

"Ginny . . . with this fluid inside of me . . . I'll . . . I'm going to live to be three hundred years old."

She released his hand quickly, striking the coffee cup. It spilled and the brown liquid dripped across the table and fell on the stone terrace in a dark shining pool.

"Are . . . are they sure?"

"Yes, as sure as they can be. That's why I had to talk to you."

She got up and walked over to the railing, stood staring at the water. Ridley followed and put his arm around her.

"That's it," he murmured. "That's why I had to talk to you. I'm going to be a kind of immortal, and I want that. I want that because I think, eventually, people can all be almost immortal, and can use the extra years for good things."

"But I can't love you, Frank. I can't love you if I'm old and dying at eighty or so and you're still young. We can't go on."

He put his hands on her shoulders, turned her around so that she faced him.

"Can't we?" he said.

She buried her head in his shoulder, crying. He saw people on the terrace watching them and didn't care.

"We can talk," he whispered. "I'll have some time to myself now . . . a month or two. We can do a lot of talking and decide. I can't lose you, Ginny."

She lifted her face and he bent down and kissed her, feeling her mouth warm and soft with the sun.

"We'll try, Frank," she said a moment later. "Perhaps we can do something . . . I don't know what. You're cut off from me. You're cut off from the rest of the human race now."

He choked at her words. Cut off from the human race. Yes, he was.

To help them, he had isolated himself from them. And from her.

"I'd better go to work now," she told him. "Call me tonight. You can come over. We'll talk, as you say. Perhaps in a month or two . . ."

He said, "I hope so."

He paid the check and they walked out of the cafe, holding hands. He took her to a copter station and stood watching the machine rise into the sky, blades making a silver whirl.

He had a cigarette in his hands, but his fingers tightened on it and crushed it. He felt the tobacco slip through his fingers as he watched the copter in the sky.

In the window, he had seen her crying.

He went back to the hospital because he had no other place to go. There was a message for him at the main desk. Dr. Lord wanted to see him.

Ridley found the tall, gray-haired scientist in his office, gazing out of the window and smoking a brown cigar. When Ridley came in, the doctor turned, anxiety on his darkly tanned old face.

"I got your message at the desk," Ridley said awkwardly.

"Yes, uh, Frank, sit down."

Lord seated himself in a large red leather swivel chair behind the desk. He rolled the cigar in his fingers nervously.

"Something important?" Ridley asked.

"I'm afraid so. I hate to tell you this, Frank."

Ridley frowned. "What is it?"

"You've been under a strain for a whole year," Lord went on, "and I promised you time to rest, but now . . ."

"Doctor," Ridley said quietly, "tell me."

"Well, Frank, you know that I told you about experiments similar to mine that are being conducted on Mars."

Ridley remembered that. "University of Marsopolis, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Dr. Thag. A brilliant man, brilliant. But he's run into trouble. I received a beam message from him just about an hour ago. His plasma replacement technique was faulty, somehow. His subject went insane and had to be shot."

Ridley tightened a hand on the chair arm.

"That sort of thing can't be allowed to go on," Lord told him earnestly. "We scientists have the right to experiment, but not at the risk of damaging human life. That's why we've always had such a hell of a hard time. I was almost ninety-nine per cent sure the technique was correct when I started the experiment on you."

"Get to the point," Ridley said irritably.

"Frank, I'm taking the rocket to Marsopolis tonight. I want to help Dr. Thag. I want to set up a demonstration replacement, perhaps lasting only a few moments, just enough for him to check and find his mistake. I need you for a subject."

"For God's sake," Ridley said suddenly, "haven't I had enough? Twelve months in this goddamned hospital and now . . . ?"

"I know, I know," Lord interrupted. "And I'm sorry. But it's got to be done, if we want to see man's dream of long life come true. I thought you were interested in that dream when I chose you. You said you were."

Ridley remembered his father, an educator at a great university, who had told him of the cruelty in man, the greed, the grasping hunger. His father had made him learn the great lesson: that man was in too much of a hurry. That he needed more time, to develop his skill in living with other men. That a normal span of years only gave occasional glimmerings of the peace between men that could be achieved. With time could come education . . . education of the spirit. That was the dream.

Ridley shook his head wearily. "I still want what you want."

"Then you'll come? The rocket jets off at ten tonight, Waukegan Port."

Desperately, Ridley thought of Ginny and the months they were to have spent. They, too, needed time, to work out the problem that lay between them. For a long minute, Ridley thought about her.

And then his brain became suddenly alert.

Perhaps . . . perhaps . . .

"Dr. Lord, I want something in return, if I go with you. It's selfish, I know it's selfish, but it's something I need."

Lord put the cigar between his lips, drew in and blew out a cloud of smoke. He rolled the cigar around in his fingers once more.

"Go ahead."

With hope churning crazily in him, Ridley leaned forward and began to speak . . .

Ridley was waiting for Ginny that afternoon when she came home from her job at the Department of Fuel Statistics. He stood in the lobby of the apartment building, smoking. When he saw her coming toward the door, he crushed out his cigarette under his foot.

She let the door close slowly when she saw him. In his face she could see trouble and anxiety. Without a word, she went to the lift and pressed the button.

They rode up to the twelfth floor in silence. Not until they were in her small apartment did she speak.

"Something's wrong, isn't it, Frank?"

The words stuck in his throat. He couldn't tell her. All he could say was, "Yes."

She walked to the window and pressed a button. The inlaid panels folded away, exposing a great expanse of glassite. Twilight lay on the lake beyond. Down Lake Drive, in either direction, lights began to come on in the towers. They were warm yellow lights, but to Ridley they were lonely and beyond reach. They were the lights of normal human homes.

Ginny smoked quietly, watching the lake, waiting for him to speak.

When he did say something, it was clumsy and halting, and he knew it the moment it was out of his mouth.

"Ginny . . . I'm . . . going."

She turned. "Where?"

"To Mars."

"At least you're telling me this time."

"Ginny, I've got to go . . ." He moved close to her, speaking rapidly, feeling the drive inside of him. He explained the situation, and went on, spilling out the dream that he had held for years . . . of no more war . . . no more hatred . . . and long golden days that could be filled with learning and real enjoyment of the beauty of the world they lived in.

"It's all very nice," she said harshly, "but it doesn't help us. We have no time to talk this thing out."

"Ginny, that's bitter talk. You've waited a long time, and I'm sorry, but now you're bitter because there's something else I have to do."

"One or the other, Frank. That's the way it's got to be. Somewhere, everybody has to make a choice."

"We don't have to."

She slipped her cigarette into a wall dispenser and it vanished with a ghostly whisper of air.

"What do you mean?"

"I talked to Dr. Lord for a long time this afternoon. I argued with him . . . told him about you . . . us . . . and I finally persuaded him."

She did not ask another question, but waited.

After a moment, Ridley took a deep breath and said, "Dr. Lord will give you the new blood, if you want it. You can live to be as old as I am."

"Oh, Frank . . ."

She held on to him tightly, and he grew cold when he heard her whisper. "I can't, I can't, I can't."

He said softly, "Why?"

She broke away, pointing out the window at the tower and the lights along the lake.

"Look at the lights, Frank. Those belong to people who are in love like we are. They have homes, and children, and normal lives. I want that, Frank. I want to belong to the human race." Her voice was full of sorrow.

"And my loving you . . . that isn't enough?"

"I don't know, Frank. I honestly don't know."

"It's late, Ginny." His arms went around her again. "We're late. Out of all the people in this crazy mixed-up world, we have to be the ones with only hours to decide. I guess I've got the dream to work for. I guess you can't have everything."

He pushed her away gently. "I've got to go. I've got to be at Waukegan Port by ten."

Picking up his coat from the couch, he walked quietly to the door. There, he turned and took one final look at her, wanting to remember the way she was standing, looking at the yellow lights in the towers that meant so much to her.

All the way down in the lift, he felt a terrible sense of loneliness, of emptiness, as if a chunk of his being had been somehow cut out of him. Now all that remained was his long, long life. It would have to be filled with work. He would have to lose himself in that work, trying to help people. He would have to make time for more people to live. Perhaps he could forget her.

Out in the street, he headed for a mobile station. A rocket burned across the sky, like a star falling away and becoming lost in the dark.

Ridley hurried on. Rain began to spatter lightly on his face. It was cold rain.

A man and a woman hurried by him, laughing, holding hands. He hunted for a cigarette, but could not get it lit. The man and woman were gone down the street.

And Frank Ridley knew that no matter how he worked, no matter how far he traveled to the worlds lying far out in the rocket lanes, that the years without her would be as cold and as dark as the rain through which he walked. . . .

Lord was not at the hospital. One of the nurses gave Ridley a suitcase full of new clothes. He ate dinner in the dining-room with the doctors and nurses. One young student-nurse stared at him as he was eating,

tremendous curiosity on her young face. Someone in the hospital must have told her about him.

He bent down over his food. That would be the way of it. Wherever he went, stares. People looking at him, envying him.

He sat up straight. His fork rattled against his plate. They might begrudge him the extra years. For a long, long time, they might . . . hate him.

After dinner he took a mobile out to the Waukegan Port. He chain-smoked, and his throat was not used to it. He was coughing hoarsely by the time he reached the field.

The rocket lay in its launching rack. Passengers were already boarding. The great expanse of concrete was lit by search-beams that shone brightly behind the rain.

For Ridley, it was goodbye to Earth for a while. Goodbye to the Earth he had known only for one day. He would come to know it again, but it would be remote and alien then.

He walked through the gate in the wire fence after showing his credentials. He walked straight across the field, the bag leaden in his hand. The rain fell and ran down all over his face and soaked his hair and his coat. He kept walking. He kept thinking about her.

All at once he stopped, shook his head and straightened up. He quickened his step and went briskly up the ramp into the great hull.

He found his cabin, hung up the wet coat and deposited his bag. Then, he proceeded to the lounge where he ordered a drink. Whisky tasted good, warm and mellow, after being cut off from life for so long.

Lord stood by the observation window, watching the bustle of activity on the field. Huge crates of machinery were being loaded into a lower hold. Ridley touched Lord's arm lightly to let him know that he had arrived.

The doctor's face was worried.

"What did she say?" he asked.

"No," Frank replied evenly. He took a sip of the whisky. "She said no."

"Um. I beamed Dr. Thag. He'll meet us at the port in Marsopolis. I expect we'll be there for a month or so. He wants to study the technique thoroughly, talk to you and all that. There'll be other doctors there, from all over Mars. . . ."

"If you don't mind," Ridley said, "I wish you wouldn't talk to me about that tonight."

"Oh," said Lord, "sorry."

The warning siren screamed through the ship. Ridley glanced at his wrist chron. "Five minutes till jet off," he said.

He turned back, watching the field.

A figure was running across the wet concrete toward the ship. Ridley smiled at that. It would be ironical. Missing a trip to Mars by a matter of minutes.

Suddenly, he put the palm of one hand against the window, pressing, straining to see.

The figure came on, through the rain, hurrying . . . hurrying . . .

Ridley breathed, "Ginny . . ."

He was waiting for her on the ramp. She was calling to him. The lights and the rain made a crazy blur. Ridley felt his suit cling to his body. She came up the ramp and slipped. He caught her and pulled her to him.

"I'm going," she said, "I'm going with you. . . ."

Frank Ridley, with the blood of near-immortality in him, was crying, because the years ahead had looked so dark and lonely, and because no one could tell he was crying as they stood together in the rain.

Finally, the purser signaled for the ramp to be rolled up. They hurried inside.

"I had to come," she told him. "I love you, Frank. It's enough for us, love. I thought about you being alone, and I knew I wanted to be with you. . . ."

He kissed her.

After changing his suit, he joined her in the lounge. The lights had been turned out, so that the passengers could observe the spectacle of take-off. Ginny stood beside Dr. Lord, talking and smoking. The jets made thunder.

They were well beyond the atmosphere of Earth when Ridley put his arm around her. She leaned close and kissed his cheek.

"Dr. Lord and I have been talking," she said. "He's told me about the experiments. If you can stay with me in the hospital . . ."

Ridley nodded.

They watched Earth falling away. The rain had been left far behind. Every minute or so, Frank would turn and look at her. The cigarette illuminated her face with a warm orange glow, and in her eyes he saw love for many lifetimes.

He held her tightly, and together they watched Earth grow smaller, no longer cold, but now full of greenness and warmth and the dream they would some day come to share.

Dr. Lord smiled as he sat and watched the first two immortals . . .

# *A Night on Mars Hill*

by DR. R. S. RICHARDSON

MARS HILL—A spot on Earth dedicated to the study of Mars! It made the long journey to the observatory seem like a pilgrimage to some ancient temple. Above the dark pines the planet itself glowed red in the evening sky. The neon signs of the little town below us might have belonged to another world.

All day we had speculated over the appearance of Mars through the telescope that night—the famous 24-inch refracting telescope with which Percival Lowell had begun his study of the planet more than half a century ago. We had lamented when clouds had obscured the sky; had rejoiced when they had cleared away. At sunset the sky had been as black as if a thunder storm were brewing. Then suddenly the clouds had dissolved, leaving the sky crystal clear. But that still did not mean we would obtain a good view of the planet, as the air might be so disturbed as to turn the disk into a hopeless red-and-green blur.

We followed Clyde Tombaugh into the dome of the 24-inch telescope. There were five of us who had made the trip from Los Angeles to Flagstaff, Arizona: a professional telescope maker, an amateur astronomer and his wife, and my wife and myself. Earlier Tombaugh had shown us the discovery plates of Pluto—the photographs upon which he had first seen the little dot that was the outermost known planet. That had been more than twenty years ago, in 1930. He had been a young man then of twenty-four. Now, approaching middle-age, he had lost none of his early enthusiasm for the stars.

Tombaugh turned the dome until Mars came into view through the narrow opening overhead.

"I'm afraid we won't see much tonight," he said, swinging the telescope into place and peering into the eyepiece. "That storm probably didn't help the seeing a bit."

We stood waiting anxiously while he clamped the telescope to the driving clock, inserted another eyepiece in the tube, and refocused.

"No, it isn't very good. Seeing's only about two, I guess," he called down regretfully. "I can make out the north polar cap and the *Sinus Sabaeus* and—yes, there's the *Mare Acidalium* but that's about all. Want to take a look?"

The image was as disappointing as he said. Why, when this was our only chance to see Mars through the 24-inch telescope, couldn't it have been one of those nights that astronomers dream about when the planet stands out crisp and sharp with the canals clearly visible! I had seen Mars many times through small telescopes as well as through the 60- and 100-inch telescopes on Mount Wilson. But never under the finest seeing conditions. Never under that superlative sort of seeing called "canal seeing." The Lowell Observatory at Flagstaff was considered ideal for planetary work. But again luck was against me.

For perhaps an hour we stood in the dome asking questions and exchanging current astronomical gossip. We had heard about the flying saucer that had been seen over Los Alamos. (For some reason the flying saucers seem to favor this part of the southwest). The object had been seen early one evening by several experienced observers. It had soared noiselessly overhead, too fast for an airplane and too slow for a meteor. The disk had several lights within it. Apparently it was quite different from any familiar terrestrial object.

"You laugh when you read about these things in the paper, but they certainly give you a queer feeling when you actually see one," we had been told.

The night air was growing decidedly chill. We were undecided whether to spend more time at the observatory or return to our motel. We decided to take one more look at Mars. Tombaugh climbed up on the observing platform and adjusted the telescope again.

"Say, the seeing's picked up," he cried. "The canals are beginning to come out. There's *Phison* and *Hidekel* and the *Euphrates*. The seeing must be five with flashes of seven and eight."

We had been tired and dispirited a minute before. Now we could scarcely wait our turn at the eyepiece. My two amateur friends got busy ruling circles on paper preparatory to making drawings. If the seeing remained good they were ready to stay up all night, they declared; an opportunity like this comes but once in a lifetime! The women weren't quite so enthusiastic. They agreed to stay for another look and then drive down to the motel. How would we get back? Well, it was only a couple of miles, and the walk in the fresh air would do us good.

While waiting my turn at the telescope Tombaugh told me some of his views regarding the nature of the canals. His theory is not as exciting as Lowell's old idea of waterways constructed by a highly intelligent population, but on the other hand it is certainly much more plausible. In fact, it is the only rational theory of the canals I have ever heard.

"The distribution of the dark maria and the bright red deserts conforms well with the supposition that Mars consists of a globe that has suffered considerable shrinkage in volume after a thick crust had formed," he said. "The crust is therefore probably under strain and easily fractured. You know, according to our present notions about the origin of the solar system, the planets were formed from a gaseous cloud that once encircled the sun. After the planets were formed, there were still many bodies circulating around, and collisions were frequent. Many of them collided with Mars and produced the round pits that we call the oases."

"Something like Baldwin's theory of the formation of the lunar craters from the explosive impact of meteorites," I said.

"Something of the sort. Doubtless the Earth underwent the same bombardment ages ago, but erosion has washed away all traces. On Mars the largest scars are still visible, although not to the same extent as on the moon.

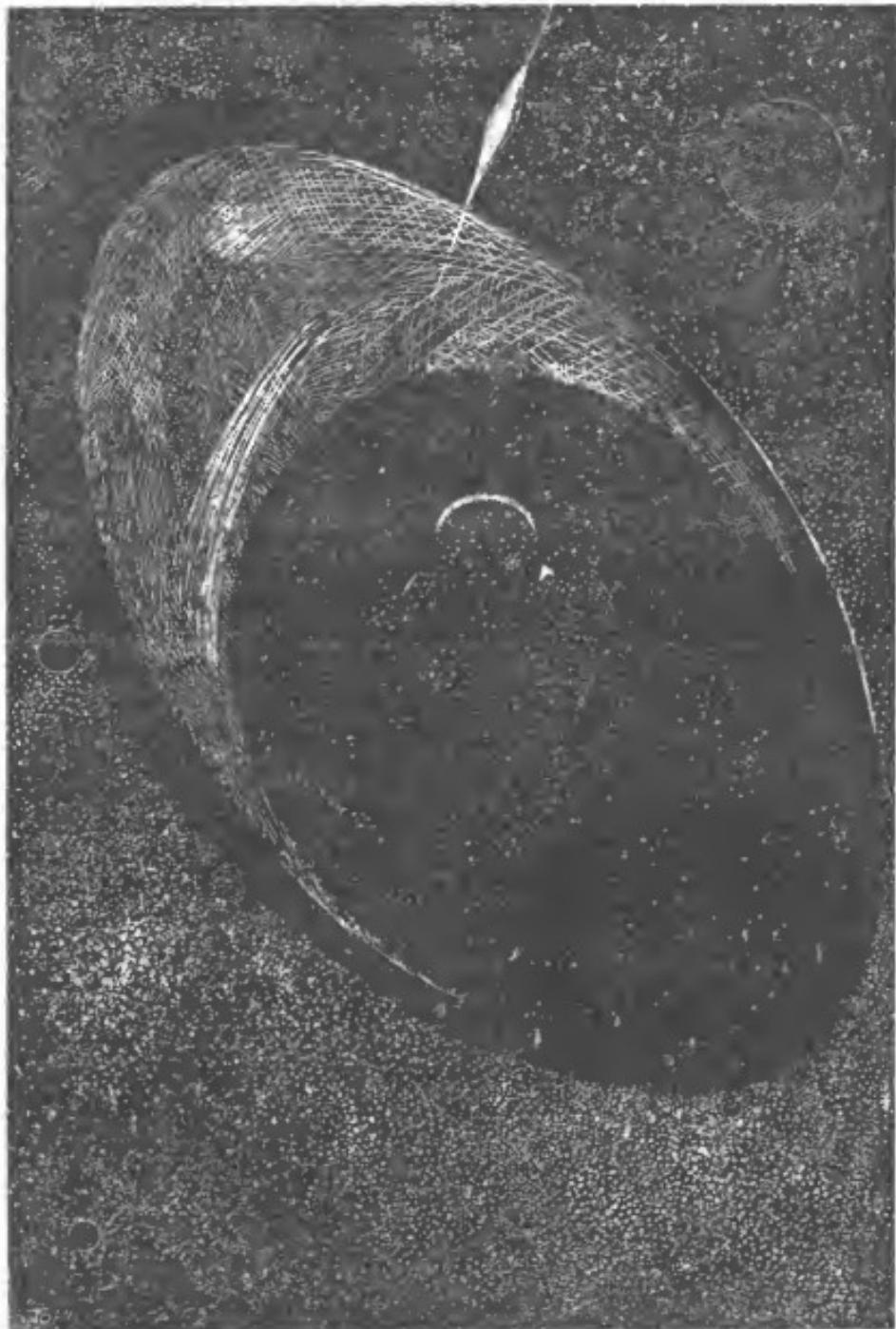
"The surface fractured, producing long cracks radiating in all directions from the point of impact. These fractured zones give haven to a hardy vegetation in regions of unfavorable environment. The seasonal behavior of the canals each Martian year is explained by the growth of vegetation capable of absorbing the slight moisture from the air after the polar caps melt and evaporate."

The discussion was interrupted by my turn at the telescope. The view of the planet was certainly much improved. Markings that had been elusive before could now be held easily for several seconds. But still no canals! True, I discerned some hazy streaks at positions where canals are recorded on the maps, but there were none of the sharp lines that come as a revelation when one first beholds them. If there is one thing I hope to see before I die it is the canals of Mars. Now I would have to wait two years till the next close approach of the planet in 1956.

Soon afterward the seeing turned poor again, but not before the others had made drawings showing half a dozen canals.

Next morning we left Flagstaff feeling highly elated over the results of our expedition to Mars Hill. At the end of the trip we had only one regret --not a single flying saucer had come our way!





*Ever done anything for no particular reason at all? Ever feel as if you were arguing with yourself? Do you sometimes get the feeling that you're really two people who are at odds over the basic rights and wrongs of life?*

*Probably you're merely schizophrenic, and there's nothing to worry about except the prospect of life in a padded cell. But, on the other hand, perhaps. . . .*

illustrator: John Giunta

## *The Parasite*

by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

"THERE is nothing you can do," said Connolly, "nothing at all. Why did you have to follow me?" He was standing with his back to Pearson, staring out across the calm blue waters that led to Italy. On the left, behind the anchored fishing fleet, the sun was setting in Mediterranean splendor, incandescing land and sky. But neither man was even remotely aware of the beauty all around us.

Pearson rose to his feet, and came forward out of the little cafe's shadowed porch, into the slanting sunlight. He joined Connolly by the cliff wall, but was careful not to come too close to him. Even in normal times Connolly disliked being touched: his obsession, whatever it might be, would make him doubly sensitive now.

"Listen, Roy," Pearson began urgently. "We've been friends for twenty years, and you ought to know I wouldn't let you down this time. Besides . . ."

"I know. You promised Ruth."

"And why not? After all, she is your wife. She has a right to know what's happened." He paused, choosing his words carefully. "She's worried, Roy. Much more worried than if it was only another woman." He nearly added the word "again," but decided against it.

Connolly stubbed out his cigarette on the flat-topped granite wall, then flicked the white cylinder out over the sea, so that it fell twisting and turning towards the waters a hundred feet below. He turned to face his friend.

"I'm sorry, Jack," he said, and for a moment there was a glimpse of the familiar personality which, Pearson knew, must be trapped somewhere within the stranger standing at his side. "I know you're trying to be helpful, and I appreciate it. But I wish you hadn't followed me. You'll only make matters worse."

"Convince me of that, and I'll go away."

Connolly sighed.

"I could no more convince you than that psychiatrist you persuaded me to see. Poor Curtis! He was such a well-meaning fellow. Give him my apologies, will you?"

"I'm not a psychiatrist, and I'm not trying to cure you—whatever that means. If you like it the way you are, that's your affair. But I think you ought to let us know what's happened, so that we can make plans accordingly."

"To get me certified?"

Pearson shrugged his shoulders. He wondered if Connolly could see through his feigned indifference to the real concern he was trying to hide. Now that all other approaches seemed to have failed, the "frankly, I don't care" attitude was the only one left open to him.

"I wasn't thinking of that. There are a few practical details to worry about. Do you want to stay here indefinitely? You can't live without money, even on Syrene."

"I can stay at Clifford Rawnsley's villa as long as I like. He was a friend of my father's, you know. It's empty at the moment except for the servants, and they don't bother me."

Connolly turned away from the parapet on which he was resting.

"I'm going up the hill before it's dark," he said. The words were abrupt, but Pearson knew that he was not being dismissed. He could follow if he pleased, and the knowledge brought him the first satisfaction he had felt since locating Connolly. It was a small triumph, but he needed it.

They did not speak during the climb; indeed, Pearson scarcely had the breath to do so. Connolly set off at a reckless pace, as if deliberately attempting to exhaust himself. The island fell away beneath them, the white villas gleamed like ghosts in the shadowed valleys, the little fishing boats, their day's work done, lay at rest in the harbor. And all around was the darkling sea.

When Pearson caught up with his friend, Connolly was sitting in front of the shrine which the devout islanders had built on Syrene's highest point. In the daytime, there would be tourists here, photographing one another or gaping at the much-advertised beauty spread beneath them: but the place was deserted now.

Connolly was breathing heavily from his exertions, yet his features were relaxed and for the moment he seemed almost at peace. The shadow that lay across his mind had lifted, and he turned to Pearson with a smile that echoed his old, infectious grin.

"He hates exercise, Jack. It always scares him away."

"And who is he?" asked Pearson. "Remember, you haven't introduced us yet."

Connolly smiled at his friend's attempted humor; then his face suddenly became grave.

"Tell me, Jack," he began. "Would you say I have an overdeveloped imagination?"

"No; you're about average. You're certainly less imaginative than I am." Connolly nodded slowly.

"That's true enough, Jack, and it should help you to believe me. Because I'm certain I could never have invented the creature who's haunting me. He really exists. I'm not suffering from paranoid hallucinations, or whatever Dr. Curtis would call them.

"You remember Maude White? It all began with her. I met her at one of David Trescott's parties, about six weeks ago. I'd just quarreled with Ruth and was rather fed up. We were both pretty tight, and as I was staying in town she came back to the flat with me."

Pearson smiled inwardly. Poor Roy! It was always the same pattern, though he never seemed to realize it. Each affair was different to him, but to no one else. The eternal Don Juan, always seeking—always disappointed, because what he sought could be found only in the cradle or the grave, but never between the two.

"I guess you'll laugh at what knocked me out—it seems so trivial, though it frightened me more than anything that's ever happened in my life. I simply went over to the cocktail cabinet and poured out the drinks, as I've a hundred times before. It wasn't until I'd handed one to Maude that I realized I'd filled *three* glasses. The act was so perfectly natural that at first I didn't recognize what it meant. Then I looked wildly round the room to see where the other man was—even then I knew, somehow, that it was a man. But, of course, he wasn't there. He was nowhere at all in the outside world: he was hiding deep down inside my own brain. . . ."

The night was very still, the only sound a thin ribbon of music winding up to the stars from some cafe in the village below. The light of the rising moon sparkled on the sea; overhead, the arms of the crucifix were silhouetted against the darkness. A brilliant beacon on the frontiers of twilight, Venus was following the sun into the west.

Pearson waited, letting Connolly take his time. He seemed lucid and rational enough, however strange the story he was telling. His face was quite calm in the moonlight, though it might be the calmness that comes after acceptance of defeat.

"The next thing I remember is lying in bed while Maude sponged my face. She was pretty frightened; I'd passed out and cut my forehead badly as I fell. There was a lot of blood around the place, but that didn't matter. The thing that really scared me was the thought that I'd gone crazy. That seems funny now that I'm much more scared of being sane."

"He was still there when I woke up: he's been there ever since. Somehow I got rid of Maude—it wasn't easy—and tried to work out what had happened. Tell me, Jack, do you believe in telepathy?"

The abrupt challenge caught Pearson off his guard.

"I've never given it much thought, but the evidence seems rather convincing. Do you suggest that someone else is reading your mind?"

"It's not as simple as that. What I'm telling you now I've discovered slowly—usually when I've been dreaming or slightly drunk. You may say that invalidates the evidence, but I don't think so. At first it was the only way I could break through the barrier that separates me from Omega—I'll tell you later why I've called him that. But now there aren't any obstacles: I know he's there all the time, waiting for me to let down my guard. Night and day, drunk or sober, I'm conscious of his presence. At times like this he's quiescent, watching me out of the corner of his eye. My only hope is that he'll grow tired of waiting, and go in search of some other victim."

Connolly's voice, calm until now, suddenly came near to breaking.

"Try and imagine the horror of that discovery—the effect of learning that every act, every thought or desire that flitted through your mind—was being watched and shared by another being. It meant, of course, the end of all normal life for me. I had to leave Ruth and I couldn't tell her why. Then, to make matters worse, Maude came chasing after me. She wouldn't leave me alone, and bombarded me with letters and phone calls. It was hell: I couldn't fight both of them, so I ran away. And I thought that on Syrene, of all places, he would find enough to interest him without bothering me."

"Now I understand," said Pearson softly. "So that's what he's after. A kind of telepathic Peeping Tom—no longer content with mere watching. . . ."

"I suppose you're humoring me," said Connolly, without resentment. "But I don't mind, and you've summed it up pretty accurately, as you usually do. It was quite a while before I realized what his game was. Once the first shock had worn off, I tried to analyze the position logically. I thought backwards from that first moment of recognition, and in the end I knew that it wasn't a sudden invasion of my mind. He'd been with me for years, so well hidden that I'd never guessed it. I expect you'll laugh at

this, knowing me as you do. But I've never been altogether at ease with a woman, even when I've been making love to her—and now I know the reason. Omega has always been there, sharing my emotions, gloating over the passions he can no longer experience in his body.

"The only way I kept any control was by fighting back, trying to come to grips with him and to understand what he was. And in the end I succeeded. He's a long distance away and there must be some limit to his powers. Perhaps that first contact was an accident, though I'm not sure.

"What I've told you already, Jack, must be hard enough for you to believe, but it's nothing to what I've got to say now. Yet remember—you agreed that I'm not an imaginative man, and see if you can find a flaw anywhere in this story.

"I don't know if you've read any of the evidence suggesting that telepathy is somehow independent of time. I *know* that it is. Omega doesn't belong to our age; he's somewhere in the future, immensely far ahead of us. For a while I thought he must be one of the last men—that's why I gave him his name. But now I'm not sure: perhaps he belongs to an age when there are a myriad different races of man, scattered all over the universe—some still ascending, others sinking into decay. His people, wherever and whenever they may be, have reached the heights and fallen from them into the depths the beasts can never know. There's a sense of evil about him, Jack—the real evil that most of us never meet in all our lives. Yet sometimes I feel almost sorry for him, because I know what has made him the thing he is.

"Have you ever wondered, Jack, what the human race will do when science has discovered everything, when there are no more worlds to be explored, when all the stars have given up their secrets? Omega is one of the answers: I hope he's not the only one, for if so everything we've striven for is in vain. I hope that he and his race are an isolated cancer in a still healthy universe: but I can never be sure.

"They have pampered their bodies until they are useless, and too late they have discovered their mistake. Perhaps they have thought, as some men have thought, that they could live by intellect alone. And perhaps they are immortal, and that must be their real damnation. Through the ages their minds have been corroding in their feeble bodies, seeking some release from their intolerable boredom. They have found it at last in the only way they can, by sending back their minds to an earlier, more virile age, and becoming parasites on the emotions of others.

"I wonder how many of them there are? Perhaps they explain all cases of what used to be called possession. How they must have ransacked the

past to assuage their hunger! Can't you picture them, flocking like carrion crows around the decaying Roman Empire, jostling one another for the minds of Nero and Caligula and Tiberius? Perhaps Omega failed to get those richer prizes. Or perhaps he hasn't much choice and must take whatever mind he can contact in any age, transferring from that to the next whenever he has the chance.

"It was only slowly, of course, that I worked all this out. I think it adds to his enjoyment to know that I'm aware of his presence. I think he's deliberately helping—breaking down his side of the barrier. For in the end, I was able to see him."

Connolly broke off. Looking round, Pearson saw that they were no longer alone on the hilltop. A young couple, hand in hand, was coming up the road towards the crucifix. Each had the physical beauty so common and so cheap among the islanders; they were oblivious to the night around them and to any spectators, and went past without the least sign of recognition. There was a bitter smile on Connolly's lips as he watched them go.

"I suppose I should be ashamed of this, but I was wishing then that he'd leave me and go after that boy. But he won't: though I've refused to play his game any more, he's staying to see what happens."

"You were going to tell me what he's like," said Pearson, annoyed at the interruption. Connolly lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply before replying.

"Can you imagine a room without walls? He's in a kind of hollow, egg-shaped space surrounded by blue mist that always seems to be twisting and turning, but never changes its position. There's no entrance or exit—and no gravity, unless he's learned to defy it. Because he floats in the center, and around him is a circle of short, fluted cylinders, turning slowly in the air. I think they must be machines of some kind, obeying his will. And once there was a large oval hanging beside him, with perfectly human, beautifully formed arms coming from it. It could only have been a robot, yet those hands and fingers seemed alive. They were feeding and massaging him, treating him like a baby. It was horrible. . . .

"Have you ever seen a lemur or a spectral tarsier? He's rather like that—a nightmare travesty of mankind, with huge malevolent eyes. And this is strange—it's not the way one had imagined evolution going—he's covered with a fine layer of fur, as blue as the room in which he lives. Every time I've seen him he's been in the same position, half curled up like a sleeping baby. I think his legs have completely atrophied—perhaps his arms as well. Only his brain is still active, hunting up and down the ages for its prey.

"And now you know why there was nothing you or anyone else could

do. Your psychiatrists might cure me if I was insane, but the science that can deal with Omega hasn't been invented yet."

Connolly paused, then smiled wryly.

"Just because I'm sane, I realize that you can't be expected to believe me. So there's no common ground on which we can meet."

Pearson rose from the boulder on which he had been sitting, and shivered slightly. The night was becoming cold, but that was nothing to the feeling of inner helplessness that had overwhelmed him as Connolly spoke.

"I'll be frank, Roy," he began slowly. "Of course I don't believe you. But insofar as you believe in Omega yourself, he's real to you, and I'll accept him on that basis and fight him with you."

"It may be a dangerous game. How do we know what he can do when he's cornered?"

"I'll take that chance," Pearson replied, beginning to walk down the hill. Connolly followed him without argument. "Meanwhile, just what do you propose to do yourself?"

"Relax. Avoid emotion. Above all, keep away from women—Ruth, Maude, and the rest of them. That's been the hardest job. It isn't easy to break the habits of a lifetime."

"I can well believe that," replied Pearson, a little dryly. "How successful have you been so far?"

"Completely. You see, his own eagerness defeats his purpose, by filling me with a kind of nausea and self-loathing whenever I think of sex. Lord—to think that I've laughed at the prudes all my life, yet now I've become one myself!"

There, thought Pearson in a sudden flash of insight, was the answer. He would never have believed it, but Connolly's past had finally caught up with him. Omega was nothing more than a symbol of conscience, a personification of guilt. When Connolly realized this, he would cease to be haunted. As for the remarkably detailed nature of the hallucination, that was yet another example of the tricks the human mind can play in its efforts to deceive itself. There must be some reason why the obsession had taken this form, but that was of minor importance.

Pearson explained this to Connolly at some length as they approached the village. The other listened so patiently that Pearson had an uncomfortable feeling that he was the one who was being humored, but he continued grimly to the end. When he had finished, Connolly gave a short, mirthless laugh.

"Your story's as logical as mine—but neither of us can convince the other. If you're right, then in time I may return to 'normal.' I can't disprove

the possibility; I simply don't believe it. You can't imagine how real Omega is to me. He's more real than you are: if I close my eyes you're gone, but he's still there. I wish I knew what he was waiting for! I've left my old life behind: *he* knows I won't go back to it while he's there. So what's he got to gain by hanging on?" He turned to Pearson with a feverish eagerness. "That's what really frightens me, Jack. He must know what my future is—all my life must be like a book he can dip into where he pleases. So there must still be some experience ahead of me that he's waiting to savor. Sometimes—sometimes I wonder if it's my death."

They were now among the houses at the outskirts of the village, and ahead of them the night-life of Syrene was getting into its stride. Now that they were no longer alone, there came a subtle change in Connolly's attitude. On the hilltop he had been, if not his normal self, at least friendly and prepared to talk. But now the sight of the happy, carefree crowds ahead seemed to make him withdraw into himself; he lagged behind as Pearson advanced and presently refused to come any further.

"What's the matter?" asked Pearson. "Surely you'll come down to the hotel and have dinner with me?"

Connolly shook his head.

"I can't," he said. "I'd meet too many people."

It was an astonishing remark from a man who had always delighted in crowds and parties: it showed, as nothing else had done, how much Connolly had changed. Before Pearson could think of a suitable reply, the other had turned on his heels and made off up a side street. Hurt and annoyed, Pearson started to pursue him, then decided that it was useless.

That night he sent a long telegram to Ruth, giving what reassurance he could. Then, tired out, he went to bed.

Yet for an hour he was unable to sleep. His body was exhausted, but his brain was still active. He lay watching the patch of moonlight move across the pattern on the wall, marking the passage of time as inexorably as it must still do in the distant age that Connolly had glimpsed. Of course, that was pure fantasy—yet against his will Pearson was growing to accept Omega as a real and living threat. And in a sense Omega *was* real—as real as those other mental abstractions, the Ego and the Subconscious Mind.

Pearson wondered if Connolly had been wise to come back to Syrene. In times of emotional crisis—there had been others, though none so important as this—Connolly's reaction was always the same. He would return again to the lovely island where his charming, feckless parents had borne him and where he had spent his youth. He was seeking now, Pearson knew well enough, the contentment he had known only for one period of his

life, and which he had sought so vainly in the arms of Ruth and all those others who had been unable to resist him.

Pearson was not attempting to criticize his unhappy friend. He never passed judgments; he merely observed with a bright-eyed, sympathetic interest that was hardly tolerance, since tolerance implied the relaxation of standards which he had never possessed. . . .

After a restless night, Pearson finally dropped into a sleep so sound that he awoke an hour later than usual. He had breakfast in his room, then went down to the reception desk to see if there was any reply from Ruth. Someone else had arrived in the night: two traveling cases, obviously English, were stacked in a corner of the hall, waiting for the porter to move them. Idly curious, Pearson glanced at the labels to see who his compatriot might be. Then he stiffened, looked hastily around, and hurried across to the receptionist.

"This Englishwoman," he said anxiously. "When did she arrive?"

"An hour ago, Signor, on the morning boat."

"Is she in now?"

The receptionist looked a little undecided, then capitulated gracefully.

"No, Signor. She was in a great hurry, and asked me where she could find Mr. Connolly. So I told her—I hope it was all right."

Pearson cursed under his breath. It was an incredible stroke of bad luck, something he would never have dreamed of guarding against. Maude White was a woman of even greater determination than Connolly had hinted. Somehow she had discovered where he had fled, and pride or desire or both had driven her to follow. That she had come to this hotel was not surprising: it was an almost inevitable choice for English visitors to Syrene.

As he climbed the road to the villa, Pearson fought against an increasing sense of futility and uselessness. He had no idea what he should do when he met Connolly and Maude: he merely felt a vague yet urgent impulse to be helpful. If he could catch Maude before she reached the villa, he might be able to convince her that Connolly was a sick man and that her intervention could only do harm. Yet was this true? It was perfectly possible that a touching reconciliation had already taken place, and that neither party had the least desire to see him.

They were talking together on the beautifully laid-out lawn in front of the villa when Pearson turned through the gates and paused for breath. Connolly was resting on a wrought-iron seat beneath a palm-tree, while Maude was pacing up and down a few yards away. She was speaking swiftly; Pearson could not hear her words, but from the intonation of her



voice she was obviously pleading with Connolly. It was an embarrassing situation: while Pearson was still wondering whether to go forward, Connolly looked up and caught sight of him. His face was a completely expressionless mask: it showed neither welcome nor resentment.

At the interruption, Maude spun round to see who the intruder was, and for the first time Pearson glimpsed her face. She was a beautiful woman, but despair and anger had so twisted her features that she looked like a figure from some Greek tragedy. She was suffering not only the bitterness of being scorned, but the agony of not knowing why.

Pearson's arrival must have acted as a trigger to her pent-up emotions. She suddenly whirled away from him and turned towards Connolly, who continued to watch her with lacklustre eyes. For a moment Pearson could not see what she was doing: then he cried in horror: "Look out, Roy!"

Connolly moved with surprising speed, as if he had suddenly emerged from a trance. He caught Maude's wrist, there was a brief struggle, and then he was backing away from her, looking with fascination at something in the palm of his hand. The woman stood motionless, paralyzed with fear and shame, knuckles pressed against her mouth.

Connolly gripped the pistol with his right hand and stroked it lovingly with his left. There was a low moan from Maude.

"I only meant to frighten you, Roy! I swear it!"

"That's all right, my dear," said Connolly softly. "I believe you. There's nothing to worry about." His voice was perfectly natural. He turned towards Pearson, and gave him his old, boyish smile.

"So *this* is what he was waiting for, Jack," he said. "I'm not going to disappoint him."

"No!" gasped Pearson, white with terror. "Don't. Roy, for God's sake!"

But Connolly was beyond reach of his friend's entreaties as he turned the pistol to his head. In that same moment Pearson knew at last, with an awful clarity, that Omega was real and that Omega would now be seeking for a new abode.

He never saw the flash of the gun or heard the feeble but adequate explosion. The world he knew had faded from his sight, and around him now were the fixed yet crawling mists of the blue room. Staring from its center—as they had stared down the ages at how many others?—were two vast and lidless eyes. They were satiated for the moment, but for the moment only.



Another scan  
by  
cape1736

